

THE LIBERTY "76" BOYS OF '76

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

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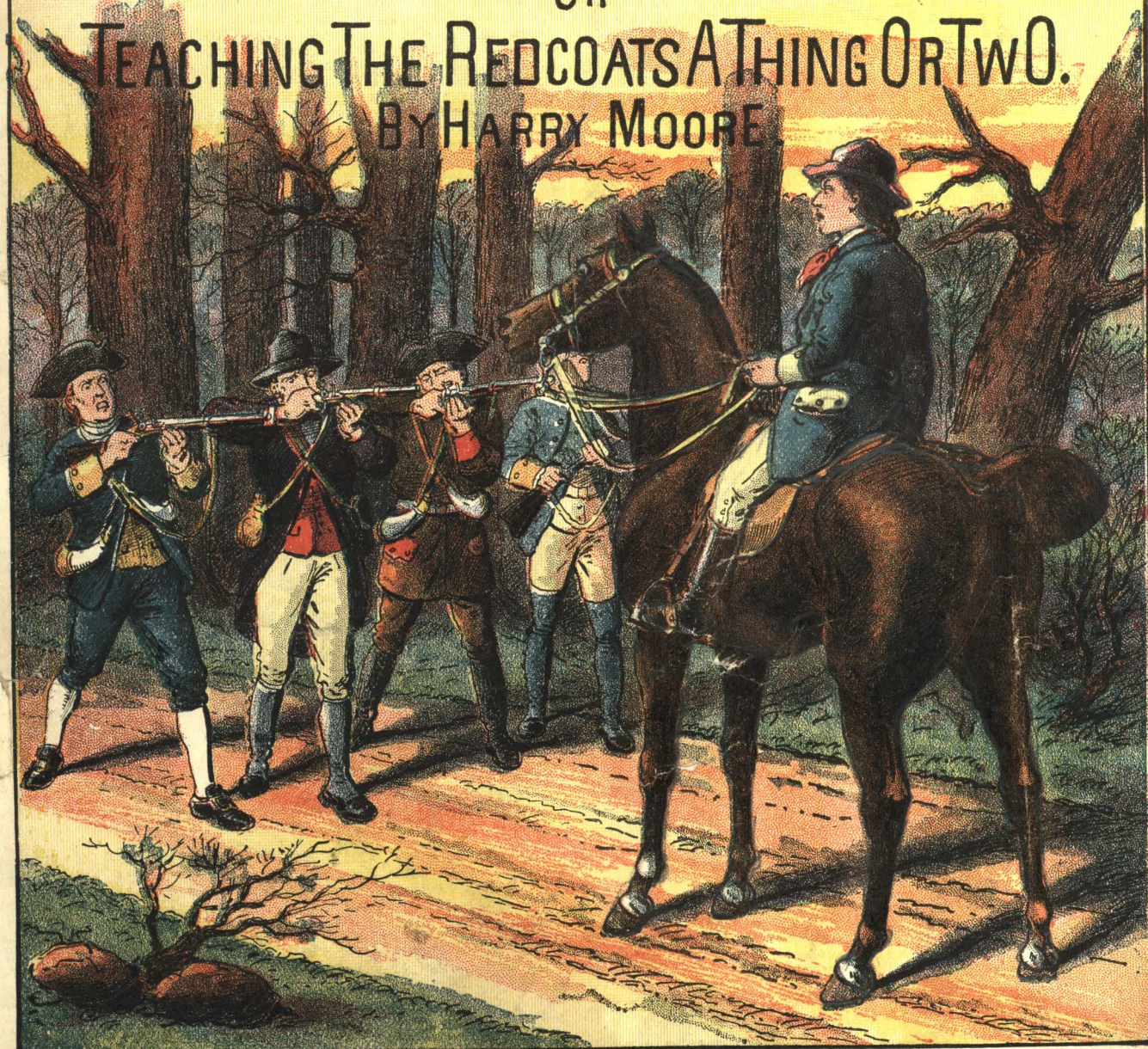
NEW YORK, JUNE 28, 1901.

Price 5 Cents.

THE LIBERTY BOYS' CLEVER TRICK; OR

TEACHING THE REDCOATS A THING OR TWO.

BY HARRY MOORE.



Four men suddenly leaped out of the timber at the side of the road, and leveling rifles at Dick's head, ordered him to halt. These men were South Carolina mountaineer-woodmen, and they could pick a squirrel out of the top of the highest tree every time.

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CHAPTER I.

THE "LIBERTY BOYS" AND THE STORIES.

On the 2d day of December, 1780, General Greene took command of the Southern Division of the Continental Army.

The troops consisted, all told, of about two thousand men.

They were stationed at Charlotte, North Carolina.

The men were in bad shape.

They were nearly naked and almost half starved.

It was impossible to get clothing, and next to impossible to get food.

General Greene had neither silver nor gold with which to buy provisions.

He had some Continental paper money, but the farmers and others would not accept this in exchange for goods or produce.

It took more than one hundred dollars in paper to equal one dollar in silver or gold—and the people didn't like to accept it even then.

General Greene had succeeded General Gates.

Gates had intended going into winter quarters at Charlotte.

The soldiers had even gone to work to build cabins.

But General Greene decided to enter at once upon a winter campaign.

His men were in poor shape for it, but he thought it would be less demoralizing to be doing something than for them to be sitting idly in winter quarters.

His theory was that it was better to wear out, than to let out—in other words, it would be better to get killed fighting the British than to remain where they were and starve to death.

Accordingly, on the 16th of December he gave the order, and the men set out on the march.

They marched in a southeasterly direction.

They went down into South Carolina, and went into camp on the east side of the Great Pedee, at a place called Cheraw.

On the same day that the soldiers went into camp at

Cheraw, a body of horsemen was moving along a road at a point perhaps thirty miles northwest of the American encampment.

There were about one hundred in the party.

They were all young men—not one among them seemed to be more than twenty-one years of age.

They were handsome, stalwart fellows.

But they were tanned to the hue of leather, and some of them bore scars on their faces, where bullet, or sword, or bayonet had at some past time made wounds.

The young men were well armed and well mounted.

They rode their horses like Centaurs.

They were dressed in the blue uniforms of the Continental soldier, but the uniforms were not new and bright.

They were soiled, and in many cases ragged.

They showed the signs of long and hard use.

At the head of this party rode a handsome, bright-faced young fellow who would have attracted attention anywhere.

He sat on his horse like one born in the saddle.

He looked like one born to command.

This young man and the members of the party are no strangers to the readers of "The Liberty Boys of '76."

The young man was Dick Slater, the handsome, brave young commander of the company of "Liberty Boys" which had given so much to aid the great Cause during the years just passed, and the young men with him were, of course, the youths who were known as "The Liberty Boys of '76."

What were they doing down in North Carolina, you ask?

They had been sent there by General Washington.

They were on their way to join General Greene.

They were to render him such assistance as they could.

Close behind Dick Slater rode another young man who had distinguished himself almost as greatly as had Dick.

This youth was Bob Estabrook.

Bob was Dick's closest and dearest friend.

They lived close together, on adjoining farms, near Tarrytown, N. Y., and had in fact grown up together.

Both had been of great aid to General Washington, through acting as spies and scouts.

They had done great work in this respect.

Dick, however, as captain of the "Liberty Boys," had done more work for the commander-in-chief than any other spy in the Continental Army, and he was famous in this respect.

He had done so much, had been so daring, and had succeeded so often in learning the plans of the British, that General Howe had offered a reward of five hundred pounds for the capture of the daring youth.

Dick had been captured on two or three occasions, but had escaped.

So now we find this company of youths—veterans all, nevertheless—riding southward in North Carolina, on their way to join General Greene.

"Do you suppose those people told us the truth regarding the direction in which General Greene went when he left there, Dick?" asked Bob, riding up alongside Dick.

"I have no doubt of it, Bob," was the reply. "Then, too, you know the people along the road have told us that the army came in this direction."

"I know that, Dick, but—there are so many Tories down here that a fellow never knows when the people are telling the truth."

"There are a good many Tories, but we would not be so unfortunate as to strike Tories every time we asked for information. We would have found a few patriots, at any rate."

"I should think so. I guess you are right."

"I am sure of it. Oh, we'll find General Greene before long."

"I hope so."

Presently the youths found themselves approaching a small stream.

It was not a river, but was a good-sized creek.

The party of "Liberty Boys" suddenly emerged from a little strip of timber and found themselves in an open space of perhaps six acres extent.

This open space reached to the edge of the creek, and on the bank of the creek was a large building built of heavy logs.

It looked like a mill and residence combined, and such it proved to be.

But it was not the building that attracted the attention of the "Liberty Boys," after the first glance.

Their attention became fixed upon a body of men, who were at the farther side of the open space, close to the mill.

These men were evidently practicing military evolutions. In an instant Dick understood what it meant.

These men were Tories.

They were learning to be soldiers for the purpose of going against General Greene and his little army.

They would learn something of the work of soldiers, and would then go and join Cornwallis.

The reason Dick knew the men were Tories, and not patriots, was because there was a man present in the uniform of a British officer.

He was teaching the Tories the movements.

Dick was quick to think, and quick to act.

He made up his mind that these men should not be allowed to augment the force under Cornwallis, the British general.

"Tories!" he cried, loudly; "forward, men! Let us surround and capture them!"

He drew his sword, and spurred his horse forward at a run as he gave the command.

He did not look back to see whether or not the youths were following him.

He knew they were.

Had Dick given an order for them to charge straight against a stone wall, they would have done it without a word.

The Tories saw the youths as they came riding down upon them.

They broke and ran toward the mill.

Seeing that they were discovered, the "Liberty Boys" gave vent to wild yells.

"Death to the king! Long live Liberty!" they cried.

Rapid as was their approach, the "Liberty Boys" could not reach and attack the Tories before the latter reached the mill.

Seeing that the Tories would succeed in reaching cover, Dick gave the order to retreat to the edge of the timber.

Once in the mill, the Tories would have the advantage, and could fire out and do considerable damage.

The "Liberty Boys" rode quickly back to the edge of the timber.

Then they spread out, to the right and to the left, and soon were in a half circle, the line extending to the creek both to the right and to the left.

A dozen or more even crossed the creek, and took up position where they would be able to pour in a galling fire, should the Tories attempt to escape out of the mill by the back way.

Then Dick and Bob conferred together.

What should they do now?

The mill was evidently a strong structure.

It was made of heavy logs.

It was almost as strong as a fort.

It would not do to try to storm it openly.

Not that the "Liberty Boys" would have hesitated to obey his command, had he given such an order, but Dick knew it would cost many valuable lives, and he wished to capture the Tories without losing any of his men, if possible.

"If we could only play some kind of a trick on them," said Bob, meditatively.

"We must think up something, Bob," said Dick.

"I'm thinking hard, Dick; but it doesn't seem to do any good."

"Keep at it; perhaps you will think of some trick we can play on them, presently."

"I will; but you had better do some thinking, too, Dick, if you wish to succeed. Don't depend on me."

"I'm doing my best, Bob."

The youths remained silent for some time.

Their heads were dropped forward, and they were gazing at the ground, as if trying to read the answer to the problem in the dirt at their feet.

Suddenly Dick gave utterance to an exclamation.

"I have it, Bob!" he said in a tone of subdued excitement. "I have thought of a trick which we can try; it may not succeed, but I think it will."

"What is it, Dick?" asked Bob, excitedly.

"I haven't time to tell you now, Bob. I'll explain in a short time, however."

Then Dick rode along the semi-circular line of youths and told them to open fire upon the mill.

"Fire slowly, and at your leisure," he told each youth; "of course, you can do no damage, but I wish you to give them something to think about."

Then Dick rode back to where Bob was.

"Come," he said, and rode back up the road, in the direction from which they had come a short time before.

"Where are you going, Dick?" asked Bob.

"Wait and see," was the reply.

Bob's curiosity was aroused to a high pitch, but he did not ask any more questions.

He knew Dick well enough to know that when the proper time came he would enlighten him, and not before.

The youths understood each other well.

They rode back up the road a distance of perhaps half a mile.

Then Dick drew rein in front of a farmhouse.

Dick had stopped here, as they were going, and had talked with the owner of the farm.

The man had been very guarded in his talk, but Dick had learned that he was a patriot.

Living in the heart of a Tory neighborhood, however, he had to be very careful.

If his Tory neighbors were to learn that he was in reality a patriot, they would kill him and take his stock and other portable property and burn his house.

Dick leaped to the ground, and handed Bob the bridle rein.

Then he made his way to the farmyard, where he saw the farmer at work making a pig trough.

The farmer looked surprised when he saw Dick.

"Air ye back ag'in?" he remarked, inquiringly.

"Yes," replied Dick; "I am back, and I have come to see if you can help me out in a little trick which I wish to play on a crowd of Tories who have taken refuge in the mill down here on the creek."

"Ye say ye hev run a crowd uv Tories inter Midgely's mill!" the farmer exclaimed.

"I suppose it is 'Midgely's mill.' It is about half a mile from here on the creek."

"Thet's it; thet's Midgely's."

"And will you help me in what I wish to do?"

"Whut is et?" cautiously.

"I'll tell you. You see, there are at least a hundred of the Tories, and as they are in the mill, which is very strongly built, we could not hope to storm it successfully."

"Ye'll never git 'em out uv thar!" with a shake of the head.

"We must do it!" declared Dick; "and with your help I think we can accomplish it."

"Whut d'ye want me ter do?"

"Personally nothing; I simply wish you to let me have the use of some articles of property which I see here in the barn yard."

The farmer looked about him.

There was a look of wonder on his face.

"I don't see whut I hev heer thet would be uv enny use ter ye," he said; "but ennythin' thet I hev, ye air welcum ter use, ef ye think et'll be uv enny good ter ye."

"Thank you!" said Dick; "you have something here which will, I think, be of great use to me—in truth, I have hopes that it will be the means of delivering the Tories into our hands."

"I don't see whut ther sumthin' kin be."

The farmer was puzzled.

Dick quickly enlightened him.

He stepped over and laid his hand on a cart which stood near.

"The box can be taken off these wheels, can it not?" he asked.

"Yas," was the reply.

"Let's lift it off, then."

The farmer came to Dick's assistance, and they lifted the box off the cart wheels.

The farmer had been engaged in hollowing out a log to make a pig trough.

Lying near was another log.

It was perhaps ten inches in diameter at one end and six at the other.

It was a nice, smooth-looking log.

It was also about six feet long—just the length Dick desired.

Dick lifted this log and laid it on the framework between the cart wheels.

Then he stepped back, looked at the whole critically, and said:

"There! That is what I wish to have the use of for an hour or so. With its aid, I think I can effect the capture of the Tories."

The farmer scratched his head.

He stared at the log and at the cart wheels for a few moments, and then suddenly a look of comprehension appeared on his face and in his eyes.

"I know, now!" he exclaimed; "I unnerstan'! Ye're goin' ter make them Tories think ye hev got er cannon!"

CHAPTER II.

"THE LIBERTY BOYS' CLEVER TRICK."

Dick nodded.

"That is it, exactly!" he replied, with a smile.

The man looked at Dick admiringly.

"Say, thet will be er fine trick, ef so be's ye kin make et work all right!" he declared.

"I think so; and I believe it will work, too."

"I hope et will!"

"So do I. Then you are willing I should have the use of the cart wheels?"

"Oh, yes; ye air welcum ter 'em. An' I'll he'p ye git 'em down ter ther mill, too!"

"Thank you!" said Dick.

Then he asked for a piece of rope.

The farmer brought one.

Dick tied the log in such a manner that it would not fall off the frame, and then he and the farmer took the improvised cannon out through the bars and onto the highway.

"What in the name of all that is wonderful are you going to do with that, Dick?" almost gasped Bob, as the two reached the spot where he sat on his horse.

"Going to force the Tories to surrender, Bob!"

"Going to force them to surrender!—with a log mounted on a pair of cart wheels?"

Bob was almost paralyzed with amazement.

"That is just what we are going to do, Bob. This is a six-pounder, and if the Tories do not surrender and come out and give themselves up, we will batter the mill down over their heads!"

Dick said this in a sober, serious tone of voice, but there was a twinkle in his eyes.

Bob gave vent to a shriek of laughter, and then presently got control of his risibles and sobered down again.

"Really, Dick, I couldn't help it," he said; "the idea seemed so funny. To tell the truth, however, I am more than half inclined to think the trick will be successful. At a distance of two or three hundred yards, that log will look considerably like a cannon."

"I think so, Bob. We can give it a trial, anyway."

"So we can. I only hope the trick will be successful, Dick."

"You ride on ahead, Bob; this gentleman and I will follow."

Bob rode slowly down the road, and behind him, pulling the improvised field-piece, came Dick and the farmer.

The rattle of musketry came to their hearing as they walked along, proving that the "Liberty Boys" were keeping up the firing at the mill.

"Ther fight's ergoin' on now, hain't et?" asked the farmer.

"No," replied Dick, and then he explained that his men were merely firing to keep the Tories from making a dash out of the mill.

"Thet's er good idee," the farmer said.

It did not take them long to reach the strip of timber.

When they reached the point where the "Liberty Boys" were stationed, those who were near enough to see the fake cannon, stared in amazement.

They crowded forward to get a nearer look.

Then, when Dick explained the use to which he intended putting the improvised field-piece, the youths gave utterance to a cheer.

They were well pleased with the idea of playing such a clever trick upon the Tories.

If it succeeded, it would be a great thing.

They had high hopes that it might succeed.

Dick made his preparations.

Four of the youths took hold of the cart frame and pulled the fake cannon out from the edge of the timber into the open.

The youths pretended that it took all their strength to pull the cart.

They advanced only a few yards into the open and then paused.

Dick then advanced, and, stationing himself at the butt end of the fake cannon, made a great show of sighting it.

When he thought he had put in enough time at this, Dick tied a white handkerchief to a ramrod and walked boldly toward the old mill.

"Let me go, Dick," said Bob; "those blamed Tories will shoot you."

"I don't think so, Bob," replied Dick; "and anyway they might as well shoot me as you."

Dick continued on until he was within twenty yards of the mill, then he halted.

"Hello, there!" he called out.

"Hello, yourself!" came back the reply. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"I am Dick Slater, captain of the company of 'Liberty Boys of '76."

"Dick Slater!"

It was evident that the man who was talking was the British officer who had been drilling the Tories.

It was also evident that he had heard of Dick Slater and the "Liberty Boys of '76."

His tone told that as plain words could have done.

"Yes, Dick Slater," was the reply.

"Well, Dick Slater, what do you want?"

"Your unconditional surrender."

Dick spoke in a firm, determined, ringing voice.

There was supreme confidence in his every tone.

"So that is what you want, eh?"

"That is what we want—more, it is what we demand.

"Humph! You are very modest in your demands, I must say."

As we are in a position to force you to surrender, I feel that I am justified in making the demand," said Dick with quiet dignity.

"Aren't you putting it a little bit strong, young man?"

"I don't think so."

"Well, I do."

"You do?"

"I do."

"What are your grounds for thinking thus?" asked Dick.

"The best of grounds. There are a hundred of us in here, all well armed, brave and ready to fight to the death. You could not successfully storm this fortress if you had five times your number."

"That may be," replied Dick; "but we have you at our mercy just the same."

"Have us at your mercy?"

"We have."

"How do you make that out?"

"Easy enough."

Then Dick turned and pointed toward the make-believe cannon.

"Do you see that cannon yonder?" he asked.

As Dick asked the question he was eyeing the fake field piece searchingly.

He was pleased to note that the log looked like a cannon.

He believed that it would deceive the inmates of the mill, yet it was with no little trepidation that he awaited the answer to his question.

"Yes, I see it," came back the reply.

Dick felt like shouting for joy.

He knew from the man's tone that he had not discovered the deception.

The fellow believed it to be a real cannon.

"Very well, then," replied Dick; "as you see the cannon, there is no need of stating in words just how it happens that we have you in our power."

"You mean that the cannon speaks for itself, I suppose."

"Well, it hasn't spoken yet, but if you refuse to surrender, it will speak, and that at once."

Dick's voice was firm and determined.

It was the only way to make a success of his trick.

There was no one who could put on a bolder face when necessary than could Dick.

"What is it," the man asked; "a six-pounder?"

"Yes," replied Dick. "That is not really a lie," he added to himself. "I lifted the log and I am willing to testify that it weighs at least six pounds."

"Do you think you could do much damage with it?"

"I am sure of it. If you do not surrender at once, I will prove it to you by opening fire with it and battering this building to pieces. I will agree to reduce the building to a pile of logs and splinters in one hour's time."

"From any other than Dick Slater, I should consider that boasting," was the reply.

"It certainly is not boasting. I can and will make my words good unless you surrender at once. I call upon you to do so. What is your answer?"

"I cannot give you an answer immediately."

"Why not?"

"I shall have to consult with the other men first."

"Hurry and do so, then; I will wait."

"Very well."

All was silence in the mill for a few minutes.

Then the front door of the mill opened and a man appeared in the doorway.

It was a man wearing the uniform of a British officer.

"Well," said Dick; "what is your answer?"

He listened eagerly, anxiously for the reply.

What would it be?

Would they surrender?

Would his trick be a success?

"We surrender," came the reply. "It would be folly for us to try to hold out when you have a six-pounder with which you could easily batter down the building."

"Sensibly reasoned," said Dick. "Order your men to march out here and lay their arms on the ground."

The British officer turned and spoke to the persons in the mill.

Then, one after another, the Tories to the number of one hundred filed out through the open doorway and deposited their muskets and pistols on the ground.

The British officer was the last to come, and as he laid his sword on the pile of weapons, saluted and asked:

"What is your further pleasure?"

"March straight toward yonder cannon," ordered Dick.

As the Tories marched across the open space, Dick gave a signal and the "Liberty Boys" surrounded and closed in upon them.

When the Tories were within twenty yards of the fake cannon, they saw what it really was.

They realized that they had been fooled by a clever trick.

They looked at each other with a disgusted and crestfallen air.

The "Liberty Boys" had drawn in until they were close to the Tories, and as they saw the blank look on the fellows' faces, they gave utterance to a shout of laughter.

CHAPTER III.

SCOUTING AND FIGHTING.

The Tories were certainly a crestfallen-looking lot of men.

They had been frightened by a log of wood.

They had surrendered when, had they held their position in the mill, they would have been in a position to laugh at the demands for their surrender.

The British officer was perhaps the most chagrined one of all.

His face turned almost as red as his coat when he realized how he had been duped.

But he controlled himself very well, and, turning to Dick, asked:

"What do you intend doing with us?"

"You are prisoners of war," replied Dick; "and we will take you to the encampment of the patriot army and turn you over to General Greene."

Some of the Tories began to beg and plead to be let go.

They said they had families, that they had wives and children who would be left unprotected if they were taken away.

"You were getting ready to leave them, and go and join the British army," said Dick, sternly; "and that excuse will avail you nothing."

Some of the Tories continued to plead, while others uttered curses, and a few threatened.

Dick laughed at these last.

He gave an order, and his "Liberty Boys" proceeded to bind the arms of the prisoners.

This took some time, and when it was finished, the Tories were forced to march down the road, the "Liberty Boys" keeping at the sides and behind them.

Two days later the "Liberty Boys" rode into the patriot encampment, virtually driving the hundred Tory prisoners before them.

Dick turned the prisoners over to General Greene.

Greene was delighted to see the youths.

He was well pleased to have one hundred prisoners turned over to him, but he was more pleased to greet the "Liberty Boys."

He knew the youths well.

He had seen them fight on many a battlefield.

He knew of what they were capable, and he felt that his army was strengthened wonderfully by their arrival.

"I am indeed glad to welcome you and your brave 'Liberty Boys,' Dick!" he said, earnestly. "I feel much more confident now, and Cornwallis may attack us as soon as he likes."

"And we are glad to be with you, General Greene," said Dick. "I hope that we shall be enabled to be of use to you."

"There is no doubt regarding that, Dick."

A few days later General Greene sent for Dick.

The youth reported at once.

"Dick," said the general, "I am going to divide the army, and send one portion under General Morgan over in the vicinity of Winnsboro, where Cornwallis' forces are. The intention is to harass the British foraging and scouting parties, and put a stop to the enlistment of Tories. As

cavalry are most useful in work of this kind, I have decided to send you and your 'Liberty Boys' along with him. How does that suit you?"

"Splendidly, General Greene. The commander-in-chief sent us down here to make ourselves useful, and wherever we can do the most good, there is where we wish to be."

"I thought that, Dick. Well, get ready to start at once."

Dick talked with the general a few minutes longer, and then bade him good-bye and took his departure.

When he told the "Liberty Boys" they were to go with Morgan, for the purpose of harassing Cornwallis' foraging and scouting parties, the youths were glad.

They liked action.

They could not consent themselves to remain idly in camp.

It was irksome.

So anything that promised action was welcome.

Two hours later the force under General Morgan broke camp.

Crossing the Great Pedee it marched away into the timber.

It was slow work marching.

It took several days of steady plodding for them to reach the Catawba River.

The patriots crossed the river and continued onward.

They broke away toward the North.

General Morgan knew that Cornwallis was at Winnsboro, and he wished to find a good place to go into camp.

He wished to find a place that would be a strong position, in case they were attacked by superior numbers.

He selected a camping ground at a point about fifteen miles north of where Cornwallis and his army were.

General Greene did not believe the British knew of his presence in the vicinity as yet.

"We'll soon let them know we are here!" he said, grimly.

Then he divided his men up into squads of one hundred each.

He sent out five of these parties with instructions to look for foraging and scouting parties of the British, and attack them wherever and whenever found.

Dick and his company of "Liberty Boys" was one of the parties to be sent out the first day.

"I hope we'll find some of the redcoats!" said Bob, as they rode away.

"So do I, Bob," replied Dick.

They rode southward.

They kept a sharp lookout.

At every house they came to they stopped and asked questions.

At one or two of the houses they found patriots and got some information, but at the majority of the houses they got but little satisfaction.

"Say, Dick, there seems to be a preponderance of Tories in this part of the country, doesn't there!" remarked Bob, after they had left a house where the answers of the owner of said house had been anything but satisfactory.

"You are right, Bob," was the reply; "a good many of the people in this vicinity do seem to lean toward the British side of the question."

Half an hour later the "Liberty Boys" came to a clearing in the timber at the side of the road.

Near the road was a large log house.

All around the house were redcoats.

They were going into and coming out of the house.

They were evidently helping themselves to anything and everything that struck their fancy, for many of the redcoats who were coming out held articles of personal property in their hands.

Off at one side, and back a ways in the barnyard, were other redcoats, and the loud squealing of a pig told plainly what they were doing.

At one side near the house stood a man, a woman and a couple of girls of perhaps fourteen and sixteen years.

All four seemed greatly frightened.

The redcoats were so busy that they had not yet seen the "Liberty Boys."

There was no fence between the house and the road.

Dick noted this fact and gave the command:

"Charge! and fire at will!"

The youths gave utterance to a wild cheer, and urged their horses forward at a gallop.

The redcoats, taken entirely by surprise, looked up in startled amazement.

Giving utterance to cries of alarm, they turned and fled with all possible speed.

They fled toward the edge of the timber at the farther side of the clearing.

This was their nearest haven of refuge, but many of them were fated never to reach it.

The "Liberty Boys" opened fire with their muskets.

They brought down many of the redcoats.

Having fired their muskets, they drew their pistols and kept on firing.

They did not cease until after the British had reached the timber and disappeared from view.

Then they rode slowly back to the cabin.

Here they dismounted.

They were greeted by the man, his wife and the two girls.

"We air much obleeged to yo'uns fur comin' ter ther he'p uv we'uns," the man said, heartily, and extended his hand, which Dick grasped and shook warmly.

"That is all right," he said; "we are patriot soldiers and are always glad of a chance to strike the redcoats a blow. I take it that you are a patriot, else they would not have been engaged in the work of robbing you."

"Yas, we'uns air patriots, an' thet's ther reezon they'uns wuz robbin' uv us."

"Well, I guess they won't bother you again soon."

This bade fair to prove a true statement, for there were now no signs to be seen of the British—save for the dead and wounded, who still lay where they had fallen.

It was safe to assume that the redcoats who had succeeded in escaping were exerting themselves to get away from the vicinity as rapidly as possible.

Dick now proceeded to examine the fallen redcoats.

He found six dead and seven wounded.

The wounded were carried to the house and into it, and placed on blankets spread on the floor.

Their wounds were given attention, and Dick and two or three more of the "Liberty Boys" who had become somewhat skilled in such work, dressed the wounds in a fairly skillful manner.

Then a large grave was dug and the six dead soldiers were given burial.

"It is unpleasant work," said Dick, "but we are not to blame. Their sovereign, King George, sent them over here to make war on us, and we are but protecting ourselves."

"True," agreed Bob; "we have to kill or be killed, and I'd rather kill than be killed any day!"

"Yes, so would we all," said Dick.

There is nothing pleasant about war.

The youths then returned to the house, and as it was about noon, it was decided to remain here and take dinner.

The patriot and his wife and daughters were delighted by the thought of having the youths remain for dinner.

They had learned who Dick and his comrades were.

The fame of Dick Slater and the "Liberty Boys of '76" had reached even to this place.

They had heard of the youths and their wonderful exploits, and they felt that it would be a great honor indeed to have them take dinner at their humble home.

The youths, being hungry, were only too glad to do so.

The woman and her two girls went to work at once.

They cooked steadily for more than an hour.

The youths ate in squads of a dozen or more, and in this way kept the women folks at work.

When they had finished all felt much better.

The owner of the house was worried regarding the seven wounded soldiers.

He disliked the thought of having them in his house, and he told Dick that he was afraid that when the British came to get them, as he was sure they would do soon, they would do him and the other members of his family serious harm.

This load was to be taken off his mind, however, and at once.

While they were yet thinking, a British soldier came out of the edge of the timber, bearing a white handkerchief on the end of his sword.

Dick advanced to meet him.

He asked that his men be allowed the privilege of taking the wounded men away.

Dick readily granted the permission.

He knew it would be a great relief to the farmer to get the men out from under his roof.

The British officer made a signal.

Instantly a score of redcoats emerged from the edge of the timber.

They came across the open space, entered the cabin, and brought forth their wounded comrades.

Three of the wounded men were able to walk with assistance, but the other four had to be carried.

When the redcoats were well across the open space, the officer thanked Dick for permitting the removal of the wounded men, saluted, and followed his men.

"I'm orful glad they took them men erway!" said the farmer, with a sigh of relief.

"It is better so," agreed Dick.

"I wush't yo'uns'd stay erwhile," the man said; "they mought come back ag'in."

"I hardly think they will. However, we will remain awhile, and I will send one of my men to spy on them and see if they keep on going."

"Yo'uns air orful good ter we'uns!" the man said.

"And you have been good to us," said Dick; "you gave us a splendid dinner, and hungry men appreciate such things, you know."

Dick sent one of the boys to keep watch on the British, telling him to return within the hour.

The youth departed at once, and was gone just about an hour.

He reported that the redcoats had really gone.

He had followed them two miles and they were still going.

"You see," said Dick, addressing the farmer, "you are safe. The redcoats have gone for good."

"I'm orful glad uv et, too! I hope they'uns'll never come back erg'in!"

Dick had asked the man a great many questions and had secured much valuable information regarding the location of the British army.

Having nothing further to detain them, he gave the order to mount.

The youths did so.

Then, with Dick at their head, they rode away, giving the farmer and his wife and daughters a cheer as they did so.

"Well, we have accomplished something, anyway," said Dick, in a tone of satisfaction.

"So we have, Dick," replied Bob, to whom the remark had been addressed; "I think that before we have been here very long, we will be able to teach the redcoats a thing or two."

"I rather think so. I guess they've learned something to-day."

"If they haven't, they're very dull-witted, I should say!"

"I hope we may meet some more bands of marauding redcoats to-day."

"So do I. The encounte' back yonder just whetted my appetite!"

CHAPTER IV.

DICK AND THE TORIES.

But they were destined to be disappointed.

They rode many miles during the afternoon, but did not find another party of redcoats.

They were glad they had succeeded as well as they had, however, and they returned to the patriot encampment not entirely out of heart.

General Morgan was glad to hear that the "Liberty Boys" had met the redcoats and put them to flight.

He complimented the youths.

"Keep it up," he said; "a dozen such encounters will teach the British a thing or two, and cause them to realize that they are not to have everything their own way in the South."

"We will keep it up," said Dick; "I only wish we could run across half a dozen foraging bands of British every day!"

And the work was kept up.

Five parties of one hundred men each went out each day, and they made it so lively for the prowling bands of redcoats that Cornwallis became very angry.

He made up his mind to do something.

And at about the time he made up his mind to do something, General Morgan made up his mind that Cornwallis probably would try to do something.

Taking this for granted, he sent for Dick Slater.

"Dick," he said, when the youth appeared before him, "I have some work for you to do."

"I am ready to attempt it, sir," said Dick, quietly; "what is it you wish me to do?"

"I'll tell you: You know, we have struck the marauding parties of redcoats several severe blows, and I think that Cornwallis is beginning to pant for a chance to get even. I know him well enough to know that he is likely to try some scheme or other. If he can do so, he will take us by surprise. I do not wish to let him do this, inasmuch as he has much the stronger force anyway, so I wish you to learn his plans, if you possibly can do so."

"I will try, sir; and will do my best."

"I knew you would say that, Dick. Well, go ahead and do your best, and do it in your own way. Find out the plans of the British, if you can; if you can't, of course it cannot be helped. I don't ask you to accomplish the impossible. I know that when you say you will do your best, that means that if the information can possibly be secured, it will be secured."

"Thank you, General Morgan," said Dick; "I will go. I will do my best, and, if it is possible to secure the information, I will secure it."

He went at once to the quarters occupied by the company of "Liberty Boys" and made his preparations.

There was not a great deal to do.

He doffed his uniform and donned a ragged suit of citizen's clothing—one that he had used before in spying work, and which he always carried with him in the saddle bags.

Then he bridled and saddled his horse and set out.

He rode away toward the south.

It was about the middle of the afternoon when he started.

He had about fifteen miles to go.

Having plenty of time he took it easy, and let his horse go at a leisurely pace.

Dick did not intend to try to enter the British encampment until after nightfall.

It would have been suicidal to do so.

He was well aware of this.

Dick was an old hand at the spy business.

There was nothing that he did not know regarding it.

He had enjoyed the reputation for the past four years of being the best and most successful spy in the patriot army.

So General Morgan certainly knew what he was about when he sent Dick on this mission.

Dick kept a sharp lookout as he rode along.

He knew that there was some danger that he might encounter a prowling band of redcoats.

This he wished to avoid.

To be captured would spoil all.

Notwithstanding his caution, Dick was taken by surprise after all.

Four men suddenly leaped out of the timber at the side of the road, and leveling rifles at Dick's head, ordered him to halt.

Of course he did so.

To have refused would have been to sign his death warrant.

These men were South Carolina mountaineer woodsmen, and they could pick a squirrel out of the top of the highest tree every time.

No, Dick would have to obey orders now, and wait for a chance to do something later on.

The men were Tories, he was confident.

But did they suspect him of being a patriot soldier?

He did not see how they could do so.

He was not dressed in his uniform.

He had on an old, ragged suit of citizen's clothing.

He looked like some ordinary country youth.

There was only one thing against him, and that was the fact of his being on horseback.

It was seldom that anyone dressed as he was, was to be found riding a horse.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" asked Dick.

"Et don't matter who we'uns air," replied one of the fellows, with a leer; "ther question is, who air ye?"

"You want to know who I am?" asked Dick.

"We sart'inly do."

"I'll tell you, of course," said Dick, slowly and deliberately; "I have no alternative. I would like to know, though, whether you are rebels or loyalists."

The four laughed hoarsely.

"We'uns don't doubt thet, none whutever," said one; "but we'uns don't intend ter tell ye. We'uns air axin' ther questions, an' thet's jes' whut we'uns'd like ter know erbout ye. Who air ye, whar ye frum, an' whut air ye, rebel er king's man?"

"Oh, well, since you must know," said Dick, "I'll tell you. My name is Sam Hardy, and I am from Gilberttown; and I'm a king's man, too! Now, what are you going to do about it?"

Dick looked at the four with an assured air of defiance.

He felt sure the men were Tories.

In case his suspicions were correct, his statement that he was a king's man would go a long way toward establishing him in favor with the fellows.

The four looked at Dick, and then at each other.

They seemed to be asking each other whether or not the statement of the youth should be believed.

"Let's see," said one, presently; "Gilberttown's up in No'th Ca'lina, hain't et?"

Dick nodded.

"Yes," he replied.

"I thort so. Whut ye doin' down heer?"

"Well, I don't know that it is really any of your business, but I don't mind telling you that I have come down here to join the British army."

The men looked at each other again.

They seemed to be debating the matter.

They evidently did not know whether or not they should believe the youth's statement.

While they were debating the subject the sound of the hoof beats of horses was heard.

The sound came from around a bend in the timber road, in the direction in which Dick had been going.

Dick did not like this.

He felt that the horsemen would more likely be enemies than friends.

In truth, the probabilities were that they would prove to be a band of redcoats.

In that case he would be in trouble as soon as the newcomers put in an appearance.

He looked at the four Tories.

He wondered if he might not, by making a sudden dash, escape.

The men were listening to the sound of the hoof beats, the same as Dick was, but they were keeping a careful eye on the youth at the same time.

It would be dangerous to attempt to make a sudden break for liberty.

Those mountaineers could shoot too well.

Dick was in a quandary.

If he waited, he would be in a greater danger than he was at present.

If they proved to be redcoats, and Dick felt sure they would so prove, it would be impossible for him to escape.

Then, too, there might be some among the redcoats who would recognize him, even though he was in a measure disguised.

Dick decided to try to escape before the horsemen reached the spot, if possible.

He would take chances, if necessary.

He would try the effect of a trick.

Suddenly he cried out in an excited tone:

"It's a band of rebels! Quick! into the timber, or we'll all be captured!"

As he spoke, he spurred his horse toward the timber at the side of the road.

The Tories were startled.

They whirled, to see whether or not Dick's statement was true.

As they did so, a band of horsemen appeared to view, at the bend in the road.

The men had on the brilliant uniform of British soldiers.

Instantly the four realized that they had been made the victims of a shrewd ruse.

They whirled again, with exclamations of anger.

Dick was just disappearing from their sight in the timber.

The four men threw up their rifles and fired quickly.

They were dealing with a youth who was as keen as a briar, however.

Dick knew the men would fire as soon as they discovered that they had been fooled.

Therefore, the instant he was out of sight, he turned his horse sharp to the left, and dug the spurs into the animal's flanks.

The horse leaped forward suddenly, and the bullets from the Tories' rifles did not come within ten feet of Dick.

He rode onward as rapidly as he could, for he knew the Tories would follow him.

They did follow him, but not right away.

They started to do so, but a command from the leader of the band of redcoats halted them.

"Halt, or you are dead men!" was the command to which he gave utterance.

The Tories had no choice but to obey.

They knew it would give the "rebel" a chance to get away, but they could not help it.

"What does this mean?" cried the leader of the British, as he rode up at the head of the party; "who are you, and what were you shooting at just now?"

"We'uns air good king's men, yer excellency," replied one, "an' we'uns wuz shootin' at er rebel!"

A look of interest and excitement, mingled with which was one of dubiousness, appeared on the officer's face.

"A rebel!" he exclaimed.

"Yas; we hed stopped 'im, but w'en he heerd yo'uns comin', he yelled out, 'Thar comes some rebels!' an' rode inter ther timber. We'uns looked ter see ef whut he said wuz so, an' by ther time we'uns hed seen yo'uns wuzn't rebels, he hed got inter ther edge uv ther timber. Then we'uns ups an' shoots at 'im."

"So that is it, eh?" the officer remarked; "I wonder if you hit him?"

"We'uns'll see ef yo'uns'll let us."

"All right; go ahead, and hurry about it!"

The four Tories hastened into the timber.

They were gone perhaps five minutes.

Then they returned, looking crestfallen and disappointed.

"We'uns didn't hit him," the leading Tory said; "he hez got erway."

"You say he was on horseback?" the officer asked.

"Yas."

"What did he have to say for himself?"

"He said he wuz frum Gilberttown, an' thet he wuz goin' down ter jine yer army."

"He said that, did he?"

"Yas; an' then run like er rabbit w'en he foun' thet some uv ther king's soldiers wuz comin'."

"And you judge from this action on his part that he was a rebel, eh?"

"Yas, your excellency."

"Well, his action certainly does seem a bit suspicious. We will see if we can capture him."

Then the officer gave orders, and the entire party set to work to try to catch and make a prisoner of Dick.

CHAPTER V.

DICK AND THE OPOSSUM.

Dick realized that he had had a close call.

He realized also that he was not yet safe.

He was sure that the redcoats and Tories would pursue him.

They would capture him, if they could.

He urged his horse onward as rapidly as possible.

He soon came to the road where it made the bend.

He could not be seen, so he crossed the road.

He entered the timber and continued onward in a southerly direction.

He heard the sound of hoof beats on the road which he had just crossed.

"They think they have cut me off from crossing the road," thought Dick. "But they are fooled. They were a bit too late."

Dick rode as rapidly as he could for perhaps half an hour.

Then he slowed up.

He let his horse go at a moderate gait.

He felt that there was no need of hurry now.

He was no longer in danger of being captured by the redcoats and Tories.

Dick knew the country pretty well.

He and his "Liberty Boys" had been pretty much over all the country in this vicinity during the past week or ten days.

At about six o'clock Dick brought his horse to a stop in front of the log cabin standing on the bank of a little stream and in the midst of a deep forest.

Dick leaped to the ground.

He walked to the door and knocked upon it.

There was the sound of footsteps within.

Then the door opened.

In the doorway a grizzled, rough-featured but kindly-eyed man.

The man's eyes lightened up as they rested on Dick.

"Oh, it's ye, is it, Dick?" he greeted. "I'm glad to see ye."

As he spoke he extended a horny hand, which Dick grasped and shook warmly.

"Yes, it is I, Joe," replied Dick. "How is everything?"

"All right, I guess; but whut air ye doin' down here?"

"I'm down here on special business, Joe. General Morgan sent me."

The man nodded his head.

"I know," he said, "ye've come down here to do some spy work."

"Right, Joe."

"I thort so. Wal, come in, Dick."

"Wait till I tie my horse, Joe. I don't want him to wander away."

Dick tied his horse to a tree, and then entered the cabin.

Joe closed the door and put up the bar.

"So as to give ye time to hide if any of my redecoat frien's should happen to come erlong."

Joe Marks was a hunter trapper.

During the time that the British army had been encamped at Winnsboro he had made considerable money selling wild game to the British soldiers and officers.

To them he pretended to be a king's man.

In reality he was a strong patriot.

Dick had made the man's acquaintance a week before while down in that vicinity with his company of "Liberty Boys," and, having learned that Joe was a patriot, he decided to use the man's cabin as a point of departure in going to the British encampment.

It was midwinter and quite cold without.

Dick had become chilled during his long ride and a brisk fire burning in the fireplace at one end of the room, was a very pleasant sight to him.

He sat down on a stool in front of the fire and began warming himself.

"Air ye thinkin' uv goin' into the British camp, Dick?" the man asked as he took a seat beside the youth.

"Yes, Joe."

The man shook his head.

"Et's ergoin' ter be dangerous bizness," he said, dubiously.

"Oh, yes, there will be some danger attached to it."

"Lots, my boy."

"Of course, if they should discover that I am a spy, there would be trouble, but I do not intend that they shall discover it."

"Maybe ye kain't help yerself."

"I shall try. I wouldn't think of venturing into the British camp without being well disguised."

"Thet's so, uv course; but ther redcoats might see through yer disguise."

"True enough; but I am going to adopt a disguise which will, I think, make me safe from detection."

At this juncture Joe happened to think that his guest might be hungry.

He asked Dick if he had had his supper.

Dick replied that he had not, whereupon Joe proceeded to place some venison and bread on a table at one side of the room.

Dick sat up to the table and ate heartily for he was hungry.

When he had finished eating Dick took his place in front of the fire.

Drawing some pieces of cork out of his pocket, he placed them on the hearth close enough to the fire so that the cork would speedily become charred.

When the bits of cork had charred sufficiently, Dick proceeded to rub hands and face with them.

Joe had watched these proceedings with an air of interest, and now he said:

"I see, Dick, yer goin' ter black up and pass yerself off for a nigger, hain't ye?"

"That's about it, Joe; don't you think the disguise will be a good one?"

"It orter be; but whut excuse will ye hev fur goin' inter ther British camp?"

Dick looked at his companion speculatively.

"Let's see, Joe," he remarked; "you're a hunter, aren't you?"

The man nodded.

"Yas," he replied.

"And, I take it, a pretty good one?"

"Wal," drily, "I've bagged er little game in my time."

"Exactly. And now, Joe, how long would it take, do you suppose, for the two of us to bag an' opossum?"

The man looked at the youth for a few moments in surprise.

Then a grin o'erspread his face.

"I unnerstan'," he said. "I see; thet's goin' ter be er good scheme."

"I think so," said Dick. "I don't think the British will suspect. But how long will it take us to get an opossum?"

"We kin git one in ha'f an hour."

"Good!"

Dick went ahead with his work and as he had no mirror, he trusted to Joe to tell him when he was black enough.

He missed a few spots, but Joe rubbed the cork over these, and presently Dick looked like a full-blooded darkey.

"Yer nose ain't flat enuff er yer lips thick enuff," grinned Joe; "but I guess yer'll do. Tain't often we see ez good lookin' niggers ez ye."

"Thanks," said Dick; "much obliged for the compliment."

Joe then took down his rifle and said:

"Come erlong, Dick; we'll go out an' bag thet 'possum."

As he started toward the door, he gave vent to a low whistle and a dog rose from where it had been lying in one corner of the room and came trotting across the floor.

"Tige ain't much ter look at," said Joe; "but he's a good hunter, an' I'm not afraid ter promise yer thet he'll ree a 'possum inside uv fifteen minutes."

"I hope he may do so, Joe."

Joe unbarred and opened the door, and they stepped outside.

It was dark outside but the light from the fireplace shone out through the open doorway.

Joe bent down and shook his finger at the dog.

"Now, Tige," he said; "I want you ter tree a 'possum. I don't want er 'coon, nur er wildcat, nur nothin' like thet, but I want er 'possum. Do yer unnerstan'?"

The dog lifted up its head and barked.

"You unnerstan', eh? All right. I want yer ter show our frien' here thet ye know er thing er two. Don't ree no coon nur wildcat; et's ter be er 'possum, er nuthin'. Yer unnerstan'?"

Again the dog barked.

Dick had watched this with interest and not a little amusement.

"Do you think he understood what you said, Joe?" he asked.

"Ye'll see," was the reply. "Thar's ez many 'coons and wildcats in these woods ez 'possums, but when he trees er varmint ye'll find et'll be er 'possum an' nuthin' else."

Dick had his doubts regarding this matter, but he saw that Joe was in earnest and had the utmost faith in the ability of his dog to understand what was said to him, so he said nothing more.

Joe closed the door and led the way through the timber.

Dick kept close behind him but Tige darted ahead as if eager to prove that his master's faith in him was not misplaced.

Not more than ten minutes had elapsed before they heard a furious barking off toward the right hand.

"Tige's treed your 'possum!" declared Joe, confidently. "Come on."

He led the way rapidly in the direction from which the bark had sounded.

They soon reached the tree under which Tige stood.

The dog was standing on his hind legs, his front feet being against the tree and he was still barking furiously.

"All right, Tige, that'll do," said Joe.

The dog ceased barking instantly and dropping upon all fours, stationed himself by the side of his master.

"Do you suppose there's an opossum up there?" asked Dick.

"Uv course thar is. Tige don't make no mistakes."

"How are we going to get the animal down? It's so dark we can't see anything."

"We can see him if we git close enuff ter him. One uv us will hev ter climb ther tree."

"I'll do it," said Dick. "I'm younger and more nimble than you."

"Kin ye do et?"

"I think so; I'm a pretty fair climber."

Dick quickly proved his words.

He made his way up the tree with a dexterity that could only come from much practice.

As he climbed, he kept a close lookout, but he saw nothing of the opossum until he reached the top of the tree.

Then, out on a branch, at a point five or six feet distant from him, he saw a goodly-sized object which must be an animal of some kind, though whether or not it was an opossum, he could not determine.

"Do ye see him yit?" called up Joe.

"Yes, I see him now," replied Dick.

"All right, shake him off the limb and let him drop. Tige will fix him."

"All right."

Dick stood on the limb and stamped on it.

The animal clung to the limb tenaciously.

It was bounced up and down by the swaying of the limb and finally it lost its hold and went plunging downward.

"Look out! He's coming!" called out Dick.

A few moments later the snarling of the dog and a peculiar squealing noise betokened the fact that the animal had reached the earth and was engaged in a combat with the dog.

Dick hastened down out of the tree.

All was quiet when he reached the ground.

The battle between the animals was ended.

"It's all over, eh?" he remarked to Joe who stood near.

"Yep," was the reply.

"What is it? 'Coon or—"

"Ye heerd me tell Tige to tree er 'possum an' nuthin' but er 'possum, didn't ye?" remarked Joe, in a tone of grave dignity.

"Yes, yes, so I did. Well, I'm glad we got the opossum. I'm much obliged to you for helping me out in this matter, Joe."

"Oh, that's all right; I'm glad uv er chance ter help ye, Dick."

They set out for the cabin at once.

Joe carried his rifle—which he had had no occasion to use, by the way—Dick carried the opossum while Tige raced hither and thither.

They were soon at the cabin.

Dick again thanked Joe for the assistance he had rendered and then got ready to start for the British encampment.

"Ye had better be keerful," warned Joe. "Ef ther red-coats find out yer not whut ye pretend ter be, et'll go hard with ye."

"I know that, Joe. I'll be careful."

Then Dick shook Joe's hand, bade him good-bye, and, throwing the opossum over his shoulder, set out.

It was but little more than a mile from Joe Marks' cabin to Winnsboro, where the British Army was encamped.

Dick knew how far it was.

He also knew the way there.

He had been within a quarter of a mile of the place once before.

So he walked forward unhesitatingly and at a good pace.

Twenty minutes later he stood at the edge of the timber and looked out upon the British encampment.

Dozens of camp fires were blazing.

The light from these fires made visible the dozen or so houses of which the village consisted.

Dick gazed upon the scene for a few minutes.

Then he set his teeth firmly together.

"To business, Dick, my boy," he said to himself. "Put on a bold face and be as real a negro as you possibly can."

Stepping out from the edge of the timber, he advanced boldly toward the encampment.

He had advanced not more than ten paces when he was challenged.

"Halt! Who comes there?"

CHAPTER VI.

"'RASTUS WINTERGREEN."

"Ise a frien', boss," replied Dick, in his best dark dialect.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

Dick walked forward and paused in front of the sentinel. "I doan know any countersign, boss," said Dick. "Heah's de on'y countersign I knows anyt'ing about."

Dick held up the opossum.

"Hello! it's a nigger!" the sentinel exclaimed. "nigger and an opossum."

"I hain't no niggah, sah, I'd have yo' to know!" said Dick with dignity.

He was telling the literal truth, but of course the sentinel did not know it.

"You say you are not a nigger?"

"Dat's what I say, sah."

"Well, if you are not a nigger, what are you?"

"Ise a collud man, sah."

"Oh, that's it."

The sentinel laughed.

Dick's stand amused him.

"Who are you, and why are you here?" he asked.

"Who am I?"

"Yes, who are you?"

"I'm 'Rastus Wintergreen, sah."

"'Rastus Wintergreen, eh?"

"Yes, sah."

"Well, 'Rastus, what are you doing here?"

"I'm heah on business, sah."

"What kind of business?"

Dick held up the opossum.

"Does yo' see dis heah animile, boss?" he asked.

"Yes, I see it."

"Well, sah, dis heah animile is er 'possum."

"So I perceive. What of it?"

"What ob it?"

"Yes. What's the thing good for?"

"What's hit good foah? What's dis heah 'possum good foah?" almost gasped Dick, who acted the negro to perfection. "W'y, man, yo' shoahly doan know ennyt'ing ertall uf yoah doan know what er 'possum is good foah. Hit's jes' de bestest meat dat evah yo' tasted in all yoah life. 'Possum an' sweet pertaters!—yum-yum!"

"So the thing's good to eat, is it?"

"Yo' bet yoah life hit am, boss."

"Well, why didn't you eat it then? Why have you brought it here?"

"I wants to sell hit to de sojers, boss."

"Oh, that's it?"

"Yes, sah, dat's hit."

"You'd rather have a little silver than something good to eat, would you?"

"Well, you see, boss, hit's dis way: Dar's lots moah 'possums wheah dis one come from."

"Oh, I see; you'll sell this one and catch another one for yourself."

"Dat's hit edzackly, boss. Kin I go inter de camp an' sell de 'possum?"

"Well, I don't know about the selling part. You can go into the camp, though, if you want to."

"Tank yo', boss."

The sentinel stepped to one side and Dick walked onward toward the nearest camp fire.

"I pity that nigger when the boys see him," said the sentinel to himself with a chuckle. "They'll make him wish he had kept his 'possum and eaten it himself."

Dick walked boldly onward.

He was feeling first rate.

He felt confident now that his disguise would not be penetrated.

He believed that he would pass muster for a negro.

Perhaps a score of redcoats were gathered around the fire, which Dick was approaching.

They did not notice Dick until he was among them.

Then they stared at him in amazement.

"Well, who in blazes are you?" asked one.

"Hello, charcoal!" greeted another.

"Dat hain't my name, sah!" said Dick with dignity.

"My name is 'Rastus Wintergreen, sah."

The soldiers laughed.

They looked at each other and winked.

Camp life was anything but exciting.

They did not have much diversion.

They were in a condition to welcome anything that promised sport.

And they thought they saw a chance to have lots of sport.

"So your name is 'Rastus Wintergreen, eh?" remarked one of the redcoats.

"Yes, sah; dat is my name, sah."

"Well, 'Rastus, what is that thing you have in your hand there?"

"Doan yo' know what dat am, sah?"

"I can't say that I do. What is it?"

"What is hit?"

"Yes."

"I'll tell yo' what hit am, sah. Hit am er 'possum."

"Go 'long, 'Rastus!" said another of the redcoats. "That's no 'possum."

Dick laughed in as scornful a manner as he could command.

"Yo' say dis hain't no 'possum?" he asked.

"That's what I say."

Dick laughed again.

"Yah, yah, yah!" he chuckled. "Uf dis heah animile hain't er 'possum, I'd lak yoah to tell me what hit am."

"All right, I can do it."

"Go ahead den, sah. Tell me what hit am."

"It's a rat."

"A rat! Yah, yah, yah!" laughed Dick. "Yo' say hit am a rat, does yo'?"

"That's what I said."

"Well, yo's wrong, white man; dis hain't no rat."

"Yes, it is."

"Yo's mistaken, sah. Dis heah is er 'possum. Whatevah made yo' t'ink hit was er rat?"

"Its tail."

"Hits tail?"

"Yes, its tail. Look at it."

Dick lifted the opossum up and pretended to be looking at its tail very closely.

"Well, what ob hits tail?" he asked.

"Can you ask? Don't you see it is perfectly smooth; it hasn't a hair on it. If that isn't a rat tail, then I never saw one."

Dick could hardly keep from laughing, such was the absurdity of the situation.

He did not dare do so, however.

He had to retain control of his expression, look sober and play his negro part.

He stared at the opossum's tail a few moments longer, then turned his eyes upon the redcoat and said:

"Dat doan prove nuffin. Hain't er 'possum got er right ter have er smooov tail, uf hit wants ter?"

The redcoats roared with laughter.

The serious manner in which Dick spoke was very amusing to them.

"Oh, well, don't get mad about it, 'Rastus," the redcoat replied. "I guess a 'possum has a right to have a smooth tail if it wants to. I must insist, however, that it looks very ratty. What's your 'possum good for, 'Rastus?"

"Hit's good ter eat."

"Good to eat?"

"Yes, sah. Dar's nuffin in dis whole worl' dat's better dan 'possum an' sweet pertaters. Uf yo' eat 'possum wunst, yo'll fin' dat yo' can nevah heah de word 'possum' menshuned widout hits makin' yoah mouf watah!"

"Is it so good as all that, 'Rastus?" asked another redcoat.

"Hit suttinly am, sah."

"If that's the case, I guess we had better try this one, hadn't we, fellows," remarked another.

"I guess we had."

"I think so."

"We'll dine on 'possum and sweet potatoes to-morrow."

"We certainly will."

"Dat's right. Now yo's talkin' sense, gemmen. Yo'll fin' dat what I have done tole yo' is ebery word so. Uf ye doan say hit's de bestest meat dat eber yo' tasted, den yo' may kick me all ober de camp."

"All right, 'Rastus. Throw the 'possum down here. We'll put the matter to the test to-morrow."

Dick threw the opossum down.

"Hol on," he said; "dar's one t'ing I done forgot."

"What is that, 'Rastus?"

"I done forgot ter ax yo' how much yo's gwine ter pay me foah de 'possum."

"How much we're going to pay you?"

"Yes, sah."

"Why, we're going to pay you nothing. Why should we pay you anything?"

"W'y?"

"Yes, why?"

"I t'ink hit's plain enuff, sah," said Dick with dignity.

"Hain't hit my 'possum?"

"Not now, 'Rastus."

"Wha's dat? Yo' say hit hain't my 'possum?"

"That's what I said."

"I doan see how yo' make dat out."

"It's plain enough. You gave it to us."

"Wha's dat? I gibed yo' de 'possum?"

"You did."

"Yo's mistaken, sah," said Dick, in pretended excitement. "I didn't do nuffin' ob de kind, sah."

"You didn't?"

"No, sah. I brung de 'possum heah foah de puppuss ob sellin' hit to yo'. I didn't intend ter gib hit ter yo', no-how."

"Oh, you didn't?"

"No, sah. None whatevah, sah."

"Well, it doesn't make any difference what you intended, you black rascal," growled one of the redcoats. "We have the 'possum, and we are going to keep it."

This redcoat had not spoken before.

He was a surly-faced fellow.

Dick did not like his looks at all.

He looked like a bully.

The very tone of his voice grated on Dick.

The chaffing from the others who had addressed him had not bothered Dick or ruffled him in the least, but the few words that this fellow had spoken had aroused a feeling of anger in the youth's breast.

Dick turned upon the fellow fiercely.

"See heah, sah," he said; "who's yo' callin' a brack rascal, I'd like ter know."

"You!"

The fellow's tone was very insolent.

"Me? Is yo' callin' me, 'Rastus Wintergreen, er brack rascal? White man, uf yo' doan look out, I'll make yo' t'ink yo' has been struck by lightnin', dat's what I'll do."

The redcoats clapped their hands and shouted with laughter.

"Good for you, 'Rastus!" cried one. "Don't let anybody call you a rascal."

"I doan intend ter 'low nobuddy ter call me dat!" Dick declared. "Anudder t'ing, I hain't ergoin' ter let yo' have my 'possum widout payin' foah hit, neether!"

Dick made a motion toward picking up the opossum, but the redcoat who had called him a "black rascal" leaped quickly forward and seized the animal.

"I guess not, you black rascal!" the fellow growled; "I've got your 'possum; now let's see you get it away from me!"

"Dar yo' go erg'in!" said Dick; "yo' hez done called me er 'brack rascal' erg'n, an' now Ise agwine ter tell yo' what yo' is."

The redcoat whirled and faced Dick.

"Oh, you are, are you?" he remarked, threateningly; "well, then, what am I?"

"Yo' is er big, white scoun'rel an' er 'possum thief!—dat's what yo' is!"

The redcoat gave utterance to a cry of anger.

"What's that!" he almost howled; "you dare to call me a scoundrel, you black ape! Why, I'll just about kill you for that! Look out for yourself! I'm going to break that black neck of yours!"

As he said this, the redcoat dropped the opossum and leaped forward to attack Dick.

CHAPTER VII.

DICK SURPRISES THE REDCOATS.

Of course the redcoat had no idea that Dick was not a negro.

Nor had any of the rest of the redcoats a suspicion that Dick was other than what he seemed to be.

The angry redcoat regarded the supposed negro with contempt.

He would give the saucy darkey one blow.

This, he thought, would finish him.

The other redcoats had similar thoughts.

Had they known that the supposed negro was Dick Slater, the champion patriot spy of the Revolution, they would have thought differently.

But they did not know it.

They thought he was an ordinary shiftless negro, just as he appeared to be.

They were to be treated to a surprise.

When the angry redcoat got within reach of Dick, he struck at him with all his might.

To his surprise, and the surprise of all his comrades, the blow did not land.

Dick ducked to the left and the redcoat's fist went over his right shoulder.

"Take care, white man!" warned Dick. "Uf ye does dat ag'in I'll hit yo' sech er lick yo'll done t'ink yo' been kicked by er mule. Yo' wants ter let me erlone. I'se a bad collud man, I tole yo'!"

The redcoat's failure to land the blow which he had aimed at Dick made him almost wild with rage.

What made the matter worse was that he was the acknowledged bully of the regiment, and it humiliated him greatly to make such a failure under the eyes of his comrades.

"Curse your black hide, I'll fix you this time!" the redcoat grated. "I'll knock your head off!"

"Take care dar, white man; take care!" warned Dick, backing off. "Yo's er gwine ter git hurt uf yo' fools wid me; I'se a bad collud man, I tole yo'!"

But the redcoat was too angry to listen to reason.

The thought that the supposed negro would be able to stand up before him never for one moment entered his mind.

True, he had failed to land the first blow, but he promised himself that he would not fail to land the second.

He did fail, however.

When he got within reach, he struck out straight for the youth's face with all his might.

Again Dick ducked.

Again the redcoat's fist went over Dick's right shoulder.

Then something happened.

Dick's right arm shot out.

His fist took the redcoat fair between the eyes.

Spat!

It was a strong blow, and was delivered with great skill.

The redcoat was knocked down.

He went down with a crash.

A long drawn out "Ah-h-h-h-h!" escaped the redcoats.

They were almost paralyzed with amazement.

The thought that the supposed negro might prove to be a match for their comrade had not entered their minds.

They were quite unprepared for what had happened.

Probably they were not less prepared for it than had been the one who had received the knock down.

He lay flat on his back winking and blinking up at the stars.

Evidently the blow had dazed him.

For the time being he was incapable of making a movement.

This lasted for but a brief space of time, however.

The redcoat lay there for perhaps twenty seconds.

Then he suddenly rose to a sitting posture.

He gazed about him in a semi-bewildered manner.

Then his eyes fell upon Dick.

Instantly it all came back to him.

He scrambled hastily to his feet.

He gave vent to a hoarse, inarticulate roar of rage.

He rushed at Dick with all the ferocity of a wild beast.

"I'll kill you, you black scoundrel!" he cried, and he began striking out at the youth rapidly, fiercely.

Dick gave ground for a little while.

He knew what he was about.

He knew that the redcoat would soon exhaust himself.

He would wait a minute.

He would simply keep out of the way, and then when his opponent became winded, he would take his turn.

The redcoat's comrades watched the affair with eager eyes.

Other redcoats from nearby camp fires came hastening to the spot, also.

By the time the redcoat had exhausted himself, trying to land a blow that would knock the supposed negro senseless, quite a large crowd had gathered.

Many of the newcomers, of course, did not know what the trouble was about.

They did not understand the strange affair at all.

They could not think why one of their comrades was engaged in a fight with a negro.

They were so interested in watching the combat that for the present, they did not even think of asking what it was about.

Presently the redcoat became winded.

He quit trying to strike Dick.

His hands felt so heavy that he could not hold them up.

He let them drop.

Instantly he realized his mistake.

This was what Dick had been waiting for.

Quick as a flash his left, and then his right fist shot out.

The left fist took the redcoat in the pit of the stomach, doubling him over forward, and then the right caught him on the jaw with terrible force.

He was knocked to the ground, as if struck by a pile driver.

More, he was rendered temporarily unconscious by the terrible stroke.

In nineteenth century parlance he was "knocked out."

The spectators drew long breaths.

They stared at Dick in amazement and wonder.

They could scarcely believe the evidence of their own eyesight.

The fallen man was the bully of his regiment.

He had whipped every man who had dared to stand up before him.

And now he had been whipped, and badly whipped, by a negro!

It was astonishing.

To tell the truth, many of them, the majority in fact, were rather glad it had turned out so.

Like most bullies, the fellow was of a quarrelsome disposition.

He was always on the lookout for a chance to pick a quarrel.

Now this would give the other soldiers a chance to put a stop to the business.

They would throw up to him that he had been whipped by a negro, and he would be only too glad to slink away out of sight.

"Dar," said Dick, in a tone of satisfaction, as he gazed down upon the fallen men, "I done guesses ez how dat white man won't go foah ter call 'Rastus Wintergreen er brack rascal ag'in!"

"Perhaps not," said one of the redcoats, "but if you remain here till he comes to, 'Rastus, he will very likely try to kill you. You had better get out of the way; he's a bad man when he's angry."

"I'se a bad man, too, boss. I hain't afreed uv 'im."

"That may be. You may not be afraid of him, but he'll shoot you just the minute he lays eyes on you after he comes to."

"I'll risk hit, boss. Uf he goes for to shoot me, Ise'll guv him anuther crak on de jaw, an' I'll hit 'im hard nex' time."

The soldiers could not help laughing.

"Do you mean to say you didn't hit him hard that time?" said one.

"Well, tollably hard, boss. Jes' tollably hard. Nex' time I'll hit 'im my bes'."

Presently the redcoat stirred and opened his eyes.

"You want to look out now, 'Rastus," one of the redcoats warned; "he'll be himself again in a few moments and the first thing he will do will be to put a couple of pistol balls through you."

"I'll risk hit, boss. I'll keep my eyes on 'im."

Presently the redcoat sat up and looked around him in a dazed and wondering manner.

He seemed greatly puzzled.

He placed his hands on his stomach as if he did not feel just right in that department.

He felt of his jaw rather gingerly as if it gave him pain to touch it.

Then he looked around him.

His eyes roved from face to face.

Presently they fell upon Dick's face.

This seemed to bring everything back to the redcoat's mind in an instant.

A curse escaped him.

He scrambled hastily to his feet.

He leaped toward Dick, drawing a pistol as he did so.

"I'll shoot you full of holes, you black scoundrel!" he cried.

As he spoke he extended the weapon.

Dick had stood perfectly still watching the fellow.

Now, however, he acted.

Up came his foot as quickly almost as a lightning's flash.

The toe of his shoe struck the redcoat's wrist.

The redcoat gave utterance to a cry of pain and involuntarily loosened his hold on the pistol.

The result was that the weapon went flying up into the air a distance of ten feet.

As it came down Dick leaped forward and caught it in his hand.

Extending it toward the redcoat, he said, coolly:

"Ise er good min' to do er little shootin' myse'f, boss."

The spectators clapped their hands and applauded.

"That was well done."

"So it was."

"You are a wonder, 'Rastus."

"He's the most wonderful colored man I ever saw."

Such, and many more were the remarks made.

The redcoat who had been kicked on the wrist did not applaud, however.

He had seized hold of the injured wrist with the other hand and was hopping and dancing about and grimacing and giving utterance to groans of pain.

"Oh, you've broken my wrist, curse your black hide!" he cried between groans. "I'll have your life yet for this."

"Not uf I kin he'p hit, boss," grinned Dick.

Whereat the spectators again applauded.

The coolness of the supposed darkey and his wonderful work in vanquishing the bully had won their admiration.

They expected that their comrade would push the matter and have another trial at the supposed colored youth.

But he did nothing of the kind.

He suddenly turned and walked away.

The other redcoats realizing that the bully had given up, gave utterance to hisses.

This must have cut the fellow to the quick, but he took no notice of it other than to quicken his footsteps.

"Well, 'Rastus," said one of the redcoats when the vanquished bully had disappeared; "you have done nobly. I think you have earned the right to be permitted to sell your 'possum. We were going to take it for nothing, but now in recognition of your good work in thrashing the bully, we are going to pay you for the 'possum. What is it worth?"

"Whatebber yo' wants ter gib me, boss."

"That's fair, certainly. Here, fellows, chip in."

The redcoat dropped a small piece of silver into his hat, and then passed about among his comrades.

The majority of the redcoats threw in a small piece of silver and when the fellow with the hat returned to Dick, he had quite a little sum.

"T'ank yo', boss, t'ank yo'!" said Dick. "Uf I could sell all de 'possums I could kill fur dis much money, I could git rich moughty quick."

The redcoats laughed.

"I guess it is a pretty good price for an opossum," said one; "but you're welcome to it."

Dick pocketed the silver.

He could use it in buying food for patriot soldiers.

The redcoats now began asking Dick questions.

They asked him where he lived and how he made his living.

He told them that he lived six miles away in a northerly direction and that he made his living hunting and fishing.

Then they asked him if he had seen anything of a large body of soldiers anywhere to the northward from where he lived.

This was the subject which Dick was glad to have broached.

While they were trying to gain information from him, he would pump them.

He told them that he had seen a large body of soldiers up in that direction.

"Dey's camped erbout eight or nine miles norf ob whar I lib," he said. "Ise done sol' some 'possums ter dem, but dey didn't pay me sech a good price as yo'alls have."

"Then you've been to their camp?" asked one of the redcoats.

"Yes, boss, t'ree er four times."

The redcoats looked at each other significantly.

"Then you're the very man we wish to see, 'Rastus," said one. "We wish you to guide us to the place where these soldiers are camped."

"Yo' wants me ter guide yo' dar?"

"Yes, will you do it?"

"Is dar goin' ter be foughtin' when yo' gits dar?"

Dick assumed an anxious look and tone as he asked the question.

"Yes, 'Rastus, I expect there will be some fighting when we get there."

"Will I hab ter bé in de foughtin'?"

The redcoats laughed.

"No, you won't have to be in the fighting, 'Rastus," was the reply. "All we ask of you, is that you guide us to the spot where those soldiers are encamped. When we get

close there, you can get back out of the way and we'll do the fighting. Will you do it?"

"Ob co'se I will, boss; but w'en will I hab ter do dis? W'en shall I cum back?"

"Oh, you mustn't go away."

"Mustn't go erway?"

"No. We start early in the morning, and we want you to be on hand to guide us."

"Oh, dat's hit; yo' is gwine to start early in de mornin'?"

"Yes; so you see you will have to stay here to-night."

"All right, boss, I'll stay."

Dick was well satisfied.

He had secured the very information which he had wished to secure.

A portion of Cornwallis' army was to march to attack the patriot army on the morrow.

Dick had no doubt that a force two or three times as great as the patriot force would be sent.

It was important, therefore, that General Morgan should have advance information of their coming.

Dick would see to it that he had such information.

True, the redcoats had said that he would have to stay there all night and he had said that he would do so, but he had no intention of doing it.

He had said that in his negro character.

In his character of a patriot spy he had said to himself that he would leave the British encampment at the earliest possible moment and hasten back to General Morgan with the news.

By shrewd, though apparently guileless questioning Dick learned that between two and three thousand men were to be sent to attack the patriot army.

Dick had now secured all the information it was necessary he should secure and was ready to be off.

He did not dare try to leave the encampment just then, however.

He would have to wait till the redcoats were asleep.

As they were to be up early in the morning, the redcoats did not remain up very late.

Dick was given a blanket and lay down with the redcoats.

He was careful to select a spot a little ~~b~~ removed from any of the British soldiers, however.

This would make it easier for him to steal away without disturbing anyone when he got ready to do so.

Knowing that he had plenty of time, Dick decided that it would be best not to risk failure by trying to escape from the encampment too soon.

It was somewhat trying to his patience, but he waited till about midnight before making a move.

The redcoats were now all asleep.

The camp fires had all died down and threw out but little light.

Dick was glad to note that he lay just outside the range of the light thrown out by the nearest camp fire.

Dick now decided to act.

He began rolling over and over away from the camp fire and the redcoats sleeping near it.

Dick took his time.

He knew that it would be better to go slow and succeed than to try to hurry and risk discovery.

Should the redcoats catch him trying to escape from the encampment, it might not result seriously for him, so far as he himself was concerned, as they would think he was afraid to guide them and was trying to get out of doing so through fear of danger to himself, but as they would detain him in the camp and he would be unable to warn General Morgan, it would result seriously for the patriot army.

Therefore, keeping this well in mind, Dick was very careful.

When he was perhaps ten or a dozen yards distant from the sleeping redcoats, he rose to his hands and knees and crawled toward the timber.

He moved very slowly.

Every few yards Dick paused and listened.

He knew that there was danger that he might stumble upon a sentinel stationed in the edge of the timber.

Should he do this, it would be unfortunate indeed.

Dick's luck was still with him, however.

He succeeded in reaching the edge of the timber without being challenged.

Here he rose to his feet.

He listened a few moments, and hearing nothing to indicate the presence of a sentinel, he stole forward into the timber.

When sure that it would be safe to do so, Dick quickened his footsteps.

He walked rapidly and twenty minutes later reached the cabin of his friend, Joe Marks.

Dick knocked on the door.

"Who's thar?" came promptly from within.

"It is I, Dick Slater, Joe," the youth replied. "I just wanted to let you know that I got back in safety. I'm going to take my horse and ride straight to the patriot encampment."

As Dick finished speaking, the door opened and his friend, Joe, stood before him.

Joe seized Dick's hand and shook it heartily.

"I'm glad to see ye back in safety, Dick," he said. "I

wuz afeerd ye hed got inter trubble. I wuz jes' er thinkin' erbout goin' down ter ther redcoat camp an' scoutin' eround er bit ter see if I c'u'd see anythin' uv ye."

"I got through all right, Joe, and I secured some valuable information, too. That's the reason I am in such a hurry to get back to the encampment. If it wasn't for what I'd stay the rest of the night with you."

"So ye larnt somethin' uv importance, did ye, Dick?"

"Yes, Joe."

Then Dick told his companion what he had discovered.

"So ther redcoats air goin' ter attack ye, air they," remarked Joe. "Wal, et is important thet ye should git back ter ther camp with the news, shore enough."

"Yes, Joe, and I will be going at once."

Dick got his horse, mounted, and with a good-bye to Joe, rode away through the timber.

CHAPTER VIII.

TARLETON CATCHES A TARTAR.

There was considerable excitement in the patriot ranks next morning.

Dick had brought the news that the redcoats were to come up and attack them.

General Morgan hardly knew what to do.

The position which his army occupied was not a good one.

He doubted his ability to defeat a force two or three times as great as his own under such circumstances.

A goodly portion of his troops were militia and had never been in a battle.

To have a chance for success, General Morgan reasoned that it would be necessary that his troops should have a great advantage in position.

They could not have it here.

Clearly then, there was only one thing to do.

That was to move his army.

He decided to do this.

He would retreat slowly toward the north and keep on the lookout for a position that would be strong enough for his purpose.

So he gave the order to the men to get ready to break camp.

When it was learned that they were to retreat before the advancing redcoats, some of the soldiers expressed dissatisfaction.

They wanted to stand their ground and fight.

Dick, however, with whom General Morgan had talked the matter over, explained matters to them and they soon realized and acknowledged that to retreat was the wisest thing that could be done.

So the men stopped grumbling and made preparations for the march.

An hour later they started.

General Morgan kept a sharp lookout, but during the entire day's march he did not see anything of a position which gave promise of being strong enough for his purpose.

It was the same next day and also for the next three days.

The patriot army marched an average distance of about ten miles each day.

The British force had followed steadily and persistently.

It had had fifteen miles farther to march than the patriot army, but by marching more rapidly the redcoats had gradually overcome the lead of the patriot army and at the end of the fifth day were only about five miles away.

This General Morgan learned through spies and scouts which he was constantly sending out.

This was the evening of January 16th.

General Morgan was encouraged by one thing.

Dick, who was one of the scouts who had been keeping watch of the British, reported that there could not be more than two thousand of the redcoats at the very greatest.

"There does not look to me to be more than fifteen hundred men, General Morgan," he said.

"Good!" said General Morgan. "I shall retreat no farther. We have a very good position here and will stand our ground and make a fight."

The point where the patriots were now encamped was called the Cowpens.

It got its name from the fact that the farmers of this vicinity were in the habit of gathering their cattle together at this point at night for milking.

General Morgan was confident the British would make an attack in the morning.

He put out double the usual number of sentinels that night.

He was bound that he would not be taken by surprise.

He sent out scouts also, with instructions to report if the British advanced to a point very near the patriot encampment.

Next morning the patriots were up bright and early.

The scouts brought in the information that the British were not far away, and coming as rapidly as they could.

General Morgan ordered that the men be given a hearty breakfast.

Food was scarce, but they were on the eve of a battle, and the men needed all the strength that they could secure.

The men ate heartily.

They felt like new men after that.

They were ready to fight, and to the death, if necessary.

General Morgan was a shrewd, far-seeing man.

He feared that the militia would flee, as they had done at Camden, where the patriot forces had met with such disaster.

So he made up his mind to so place them that they could not flee far, or bring demoralization to the ranks of the other soldiers.

General Morgan knew that heroic measures would have to be adopted.

To this end he selected a position not far from the bank of a creek which emptied into the Broad River.

There was no ford here.

The water was deep.

The British would attack him from the other direction, of course, and to keep from being forced back into the creek, even the militia would be apt to fight bravely.

In addition, the woods were open, there being no underbrush near at hand behind which the militia might wish to hide nor were there any swamps to which they could flee.

Not far from the creek were a couple of ridges of land.

The one in front and farthest from the creek was not so high as the other.

On this first ridge General Morgan stationed the militia.

To give the militia courage, General Morgan selected one hundred men, each and everyone of whom was a dead shot with the rifle, and stationed them in a string along in front of the militia.

On the second ridge, at about the center, General Morgan stationed his best troops, consisting of Maryland and Virginia veterans, men who had fought at Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth and other places.

On the left he placed his riflemen.

Just behind this ridge he stationed the cavalry, made up in the main of Dick Slater's company of "Liberty Boys."

They were back where they could not be seen by the advancing British, but where they could get into action in a twinkling when the right time came.

Presently the British came in sight and began forming for the battle.

While this was going on, General Morgan was not idle.

He moved along the lines and here and there among the men giving them advice and encouraging them.

"Keep cool," he told the militia; "don't be afraid; don't fire wildly; take good aim, just as if you were firing at a squirrel, and you will bring your man down every time. Two or three such volleys and you will put a stop to the advance of the British."

The British had finished forming their lines by this time.

The men had been up half the night marching through the timber in the darkness and were tired and hungry.

Colonel Tarleton, their commander, however, would not wait to let them eat and get a brief rest.

He would attack and annihilate the patriots in a jiffy, and his men could rest and eat breakfast afterward.

So as soon as his men were formed, he gave the order to charge.

The patriot militia were commanded by the redoubtable Pickens, who as the leader of a patriot band had done such good work in the past, and he managed to inspire his men with a feeling of confidence quite unusual for men who were for the first time under fire.

As the British advanced, the militia and the hundred picked riflemen poured several volleys into the redcoat ranks.

This was a warmer reception than the British had expected and they wavered and hesitated.

Presently the British recovered courage, however, and again pressed forward.

The militia now fell back under orders from their commander.

They moved backward without confusion or disorder.

It was as remarkable as it was a splendid spectacle.

They did not seem at all frightened and quietly and calmly made their way around behind the lines on the second ridge.

These lines, it will be remembered, consisted of the Maryland and Virginia veterans, who now took up the fighting where the militia had left off.

The British, however, had made the mistake of thinking that the militia were retiring because defeated, and they had come on after them as rapidly as possible.

At this instant General Morgan gave the signal for Dick and his "Liberty Boys" to go into action.

Dick gave the order instantly.

The next moment they were in motion.

They galloped around the side of the hill in a semi-circle and charged the British right wing.

The "Liberty Boys" gave vent to cheer after cheer. They fought like fiends.

"Down with the king! Long live Liberty!" they cried.

Answering cheers went up from the veterans on the top of the ridge.

The wonderful work of the "Liberty Boys" inspired all the patriot soldiers to fight their best.

While this was going on the militia was reformed by pickets behind the ridge.

As soon as this was accomplished the militia marched around the hill and attacked the left flank of the British.

The instant the militia appeared and attacked the red-coats, the Maryland and Virginia veterans charged bayonets.

The British being thus between two fires and feeling that they would be slaughtered if they attempted to fight longer, threw down their arms and surrendered.

That is to say, the majority of them did.

Some fled and managed to escape, among them being a portion of the dragoons under Colonel Tarleton himself.

It is said that out of eleven hundred men—which was the real number of British engaged in the battle—only two hundred and seventy escaped.

The British loss was two hundred and thirty killed and wounded, and six hundred prisoners.

They lost in addition two field pieces and one thousand stand of arms.

The American loss was twelve killed and sixty-one wounded.

It has been claimed, and no doubt justly, that this little battle was the most brilliant and wonderful battle fought during the Revolution.

General Morgan, old hero and veteran that he was, here proved himself possessed of military genius scarcely inferior to that possessed by Generals Washington and Greene.

To say that General Morgan was delighted with the result of the battle is stating it mildly.

He was overjoyed, and he had a right to be.

He had not expected such a decisive victory.

Nor had he expected to win it so quickly.

From start to finish the battle had taken up not much more than half an hour of time, had not much more than got started before it ended.

CHAPTER IX.

CORNWALLIS HEARS BAD NEWS.

On the evening of the seventeenth day of January—on the morning of which day the battle of the Cowpens had

been fought—General Cornwallis with his army had gone into camp at a point midway between the Broad and the Catawba Rivers.

The point where he was encamped was about thirty miles from the Cowpens in an almost due easterly direction.

General Cornwallis was just about ready to sit down to his supper when a British dragoon came galloping into camp and half leaped, half fell off his foaming horse, in front of the general's tent.

He hastened into the tent.

"I am a messenger from Colonel Tarleton!" the dragoon cried; "he sent me to inform you that he attacked the rebels at the Cowpens this morning, and was utterly defeated! He—"

"What is that you say!" cried Cornwallis, leaping to his feet in excitement; "you do not mean it! It cannot be true! What! Colonel Tarleton defeated by the rebels?—impossible!"

"I beg your pardon, General Cornwallis, but I was there, and saw it all. We were not only defeated, but we lost at least eight hundred men, killed, wounded and prisoners! Less than three hundred escaped!"

General Cornwallis turned pale.

He realized that the trooper was speaking the truth.

"But I don't understand!" he said; "how did it happen? How many of the rebels were there?"

"About a thousand, sir."

"While Tarleton had eleven hundred! And the rebels defeated him, and captured and killed eight hundred? How in the name of all that is wonderful did it happen?"

"I hardly know, sir," was the reply; "we attacked them fiercely and seemed to have the best of it, as we forced the rebels back, but just when we thought we had them whipped, we were suddenly attacked on both right and left flanks, and before we knew it, almost, they had us at their mercy. As I have said, some escaped, but at least eight hundred were killed, wounded or captured."

General Cornwallis was almost paralyzed.

That the Tartar, Tarleton, should meet with such a crushing defeat was something entirely unexpected.

Cornwallis questioned the trooper eagerly.

He wished to learn all about it.

Even yet he was unwilling to believe it was as bad as the trooper said.

He could not bring himself to believe it.

While he was still talking to the trooper, however, the fugitives began coming in.

One after another they came.

The dragoons, of course, arrived first, and they were all in camp before nightfall.

The foot soldiers did not begin arriving till way in the night, and many did not get in till next morning.

Tarleton himself arrived while yet Cornwallis was questioning the trooper.

One look at Tarleton satisfied General Cornwallis.

He saw that the trooper's story was true.

Cornwallis questioned Tarleton eagerly.

It was hard for Tarleton to have to tell the story of his defeat, but he finally managed to do so.

The British general was not a fool by any means.

He was shrewd and far-seeing.

When Tarleton explained regarding the formation of the patriot troops and described their maneuvers and their system of battle he understood it all.

He saw plainly that their defeat had been caused by the military genius of General Morgan.

He could not help admiring the patriot general for his brilliancy, but at the same time, his anger at the result of the battle was not any the less on that account.

He burned to avenge the disaster.

He felt sure that General Morgan would retreat into North Carolina, and would try to get across the Catawba River and perhaps the Yadkin, and rejoin Greene's force which was at Cheraw, a hundred miles distant.

Cornwallis thought that by marching north he could head off Morgan before he could get across the Catawba.

If he could do this, he could release the six hundred prisoners and recover his field pieces and other arms and plunder.

Also, if he had good luck, he could put Morgan's force to flight and perhaps capture a major portion of it.

Cornwallis decided, however, that he would wait until joined by General Leslie, who was coming to join him from Camden, with about one thousand men.

* * * * *

But General Morgan was doing some thinking himself.

He was a shrewd, far-seeing man.

He asked himself what Cornwallis would be likely to do.

He reasoned that Cornwallis would be wildly angry.

He would attempt to rescue the prisoners, and, if possible, annihilate the patriots.

General Morgan quickly made up his mind what to do.

He would despatch a trusty messenger to General Greene, at Cheraw, with the news of the victory at the Cowpens, and then he would march northeastward and try to get across the Catawba and Yadkin Rivers before Cornwallis could head him off.

If he could do this he could rejoin General Greene.

General Morgan at once sent for Dick.

"Dick," he said, when the youth appeared at his tent "I am going to ask you to do a favor for me."

"I will do it, if I possibly can, General Morgan," was the prompt reply.

"I was sure of it, Dick. Well, what I am going to ask you to do is this: I wish you to go across the country to Cheraw, and take a message to General Greene. Will you do it?"

"I will make the attempt, sir."

"Good! I have others whom I might send, Dick, but none in whom I have such confidence as in you. It is very important that the message should reach General Greene at the earliest possible moment, and I know you are likely to succeed where others might fail."

"Thank you, sir. I shall certainly do my best to reach General Greene with the message. When shall I start? At once, I suppose?"

"At once, Dick! I will trust you to tell the general the news. Tell him I will march northeastward, and try to get across the Catawba and Yadkin Rivers ahead of Cornwallis. You know what to tell him regarding the battle of to-day."

"I think so, sir," with a smile.

Dick bade the general good-bye, and was soon riding away into the darkness.

Dick thought it might be a good idea to see what Cornwallis was doing, so as to be able to tell General Greene, so he rode almost straight eastward.

He rode onward, steadily, until about three o'clock in the morning; then he came in sight of camp fires.

"The British encampment!" thought Dick; "well, as my horse is tired, I think I will stop and reconnoiter a bit."

Dick leaped to the ground, and, tying his horse to a tree, stole forward toward the camp fires.

He was very careful.

He was on an important mission, and it would have been a very bad thing indeed if he had been captured.

He approached as close as he thought it safe to approach, and then paused.

He was surprised to see soldiers up and stirring.

Some were eating.

"I wonder if they are going to start on the march?" Dick asked himself.

Then an understanding of the affair came to him as he saw a soldier enter the camp with weary, dragging steps, and approach one of the camp fires.

"I know now!" the youth said to himself; "those are the soldiers who escaped from us at the Cowpens! They are just getting here."

This made Dick feel better.

It was now well along toward morning, and Cornwallis had not broken camp.

He evidently did not intend doing so before morning.

And Dick was confident that the patriot force under General Morgan had been marching during the greater portion of the night.

Dick watched a few minutes longer, and then stole back to where he had left his horse.

Mounting, he rode away.

He made a half circuit to the southward, and then continued on his journey.

When morning came, he stopped at a farmhouse and got breakfast.

As soon as his horse had eaten, and had a little rest, Dick was away again.

He rode onward till about ten o'clock, when he came to the Catawba River.

He swam his horse across, and continued onward.

A couple of miles beyond the river, just as he emerged from some timber, where the road bent, Dick found himself confronted by a large force of British.

There were at least a thousand of the redcoats, and the advance guard was not more than two hundred yards distant.

CHAPTER X.

A LIVELY CHASE.

Dick was surprised

He had not expected to meet any redcoats over on this side of the river.

This was the force under General Leslie, en route from Camden, to join Cornwallis, but Dick, of course, did not know it.

It didn't matter, either.

They were redcoats, and that was sufficient.

He must get out of the way, and that in a hurry, too.

It would not do to allow himself to be captured.

Whirling his horse, Dick rode back into the timber as quickly as possible.

The British gave vent to shouts, and hastened forward.

They evidently suspected that Dick was a patriot.

Doubtless they suspected that he was a spy.

They would capture him, if they possibly could do so.

Dick rode back up the road as a gallop.

The soldiers were afoot, and by the time they reached the turn in the road, their intended victim was a goodly distance away.

They fired a volley, but the bullets fell short.

Dick remembered having seen a road, leading off to the left a mile back, and he rode to this, and, turning into it, made his way in the new direction at a gallop.

He rode in the new direction a couple of miles, and then he once more turned in the direction in which he wished to go.

"That was rather a close call," the youth thought. "I had no idea that there was a British force in the vicinity."

Dick rode all day long, stopping only for dinner and supper.

He rode until nightfall, or rather till it got so dark he could see nothing, and then, as a storm seemed brewing, he decided to stop over night at a house which he came to.

He was very tired and sleepy, anyway, not having had any sleep to speak of for several nights past.

So Dick leaped from his horse in front of the door of the log house, and when the owner of the house came to the door in response to his knock, Dick asked if he might remain over night.

The man—a typical settler of that section—said that he might, and Dick was soon resting beneath the roof of the homely, but homelike cabin.

Dick learned that he was within fifteen miles of Cheraw. This was cheering intelligence.

"I will get up early in the morning," the youth said to himself, "and will ride onward, and reach Cheraw by the time General Greene is up."

Dick was up bright and early next morning.

He ate breakfast, and the good-hearted settler refused to accept pay for it.

Dick thanked him, and then, mounting his horse, rode away.

The settler had given him directions which way to go, and Dick felt that he would have no difficulty in finding the way to Cheraw.

Nor did he.

He did as he had figured on doing.

When he reached the patriot encampment at Cheraw, General Greene had just finished eating his breakfast.

Dick went at once to the general's headquarters.

General Greene knew Dick well.

They had fought together on more than one battlefield.

He knew that the appearance of Dick, in the role of special messenger, meant that something of importance had occurred.

Had Morgan been attacked and defeated?

This was the first thought that occurred to General Greene.

He looked at Dick's face eagerly, inquiringly and somewhat fearfully.

The look reassured him.

Dick did not look like he was the bearer of the news of defeat and disaster.

Dick did not wait for General Greene to formulate his inquiry into words.

"I have come from General Morgan, General Greene," said Dick; "he sent me to tell you that he was attacked day before yesterday at the Cowpens, by eleven hundred British under Tarleton, and that the British were defeated."

"Say you so, Dick?" cried General Greene; "good! glorious! But what were the losses? Did Morgan's force suffer greatly?"

"Not so greatly as the British force suffered, General Greene; we lost only twelve killed and sixty-one wounded."

"And the British?"

There was eager interest in General Greene's face and eyes.

"The British loss, General Greene, was two hundred and thirty killed and wounded, and six hundred prisoners, in addition—"

General Greene leaped to his feet in astonishment, and stared at Dick as if he could not credit the evidence of his own hearing.

"What!" he cried; "do you really mean it, Dick? Do you really mean to tell me that General Morgan defeated Tarleton, and killed and captured more than eight hundred of the British, with the loss of less than one hundred men!"

Dick bowed.

"I certainly do mean that very thing, General Greene!" he said; "and in addition to that, we captured two field pieces and one thousand stand of arms."

"Glorious! glorious!" cried Greene; "this news indeed puts new life and energy into me! And he defeated the bloodthirsty Tarleton, and put his force to rout—captured and killed the majority of his men! It is wonderful! It is grand!"

"It certainly was a wonderful battle, General Greene," said Dick, and then at General Greene's solicitation, he described the battle in detail.

General Greene's eyes sparkled as he listened, and he from time to time uttered exclamations of approval, as Dick described the maneuvers which had been made by the different bodies of men under Morgan.

Then Dick told the general what General Morgan had said he was going to do, viz.: march northeastward and

try to get across the Catawba, and also the Yadkin River ahead of Cornwallis, if possible.

Dick also told of having seen Cornwallis' force encamped at a point about thirty miles east of the Cowpens, and of meeting the force of redcoats on the east side of the Catawba.

General Greene nodded his head, as he listened.

"Cornwallis is waiting for the reinforcements to reach him," he said; "and as soon as that force joins him—which it has probably done by this time—he will march rapidly northward, with the intention of cutting Morgan off, and keeping him from crossing the Catawba."

"That is what General Morgan himself thought, sir," said Dick; "and that is the reason he decided to march at once, the same evening that the battle ended."

General Greene sent word for his staff officers to come to headquarters at once.

They were soon there, and when General Greene told them of the wonderful victory which General Morgan had won they were delighted.

Dick went out, and the news soon spread among the men.

They cheered till the air rang.

They were wild with joy.

The fact that it was Tarleton—Tarleton, the butcher—who had been thus defeated, added to their pleasure.

They hated Tarleton.

General Greene and his officers held a council of war.

It was decided that the force under General Greene would move northward to join Morgan's force as soon as it should get across the Yadkin.

Other things were decided upon, too.

As soon as the council was ended, General Greene sent for Dick, and two others who had acted as messengers for him at other times.

One of these two the general sent on a good horse, with instructions to ride northward two hundred miles to the Virginia line.

He was to see to it that boats were gathered up, on the Dan River, and held there in readiness for the use of the army, in crossing.

The other man was sent away well mounted.

He was sent to the southward.

He was to find Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox," who was here, there and everywhere, moving so swiftly that the British never knew where to look for him.

The order which General Greene sent to Marion was that he should follow Cornwallis up, cut off his detachments and worry him all that he possibly could.

Then, when the other two had gone, the general turned to Dick.

"Now, Dick, for your part," he said, "I wish you to ride at once northward to a point nearly opposite Salisbury, and see to gathering up all the boats along the river near there. We will wish to get across quickly, and the British, through being unable to secure any boats, will have a hard time getting across."

"I will go at once," said Dick; "I rode only fifteen miles this morning, and my horse is comparatively fresh."

Dick was soon in the saddle and riding northward.

And within two hours of the time he left, the patriot force was on the move.

The main body, under the command of General Huger, marched northward, going in much the same direction that Dick was going.

General Greene, however, accompanied by a small body of troopers, crossed the Great Pedee near Cheraw, and rode away in a northeasterly direction.

It was Greene's intention to reach Morgan at about the point where he would cross the Catawba.

* * * * *

General Morgan had not been idle.

He had left the camp at the Cowpens at about midnight on the night of the day on which the battle had been fought.

The men had marched steadily, resolutely, doggedly.

They had whipped the British, and were exultant.

They felt that they would kill themselves walking before they would lose the prisoners they had captured.

They could make only slow progress, however, at first.

It rained and this made it bad.

During the first twenty-four hours only a dozen miles were traversed.

After that, when it quit raining, they did better.

They reached the Broad River and crossed it.

Then they pushed on, and presently reached the Little Catawba.

They had as yet seen or heard nothing of Cornwallis.

They crossed the Little Catawba and pressed onward.

If they succeeded in reaching and crossing the Big Catawba ahead of the British, they would feel comparatively safe.

General Morgan's scouts who remained behind to keep watch for Cornwallis, finally sighted him.

It was immediately after he had crossed the Little Catawba.

While they were reconnoitering, they saw a strange sight.

The British deliberately burned up most of their wagons and baggage, consisting of plunder of all kinds.

"What can that mean?" the scouts asked themselves.

"Morgan will know," they added, and they hied themselves away to tell him what they had seen.

General Morgan did know.

"It means that Cornwallis is determined to overtake us," he said; "he is burning his baggage, so as to have nothing to impede progress. He will live off the country, and march rapidly, day and night. We must move, and move quickly, too!"

The general was sick with rheumatism. It caused him great suffering to travel, but travel he must, and did.

Onward moved the little army.

It must reach the Big Catawba ahead of Cornwallis.

The tired soldiers bore up bravely.

They had won a great victory, and they were determined to keep it a victory.

Finally they reached the Catawba.

The prisoners and baggage were sent across, and then the soldiers followed.

The sun was almost down when the last soldier stepped ashore.

And at the same instant the leading detachment of the British force appeared on the side the patriots had just left.

The redcoats did not dare cross, until after the main force came up, and when Cornwallis arrived it was so late that he decided to wait until morning.

His men were very tired, and needed the rest, anyway.

Soon after dark it began raining.

It rained all night long—fairly poured down.

When morning came, the river was swollen to such an extent that it could not be forded.

When Cornwallis saw the turbulent, swollen stream rolling between him and his intended prey, he was chagrined and angry.

"I should have crossed last night," he said.

Cornwallis was a determined and energetic man, however.

He knew that the stream would soon go down, and he made arrangements to cross as soon as it should do so.

He sent Colonel Webster with a detachment to Beattie's Ford, and he with the main force made his way down the river to Cowan's Ford, six miles below.

Webster was to make a feint of crossing, and Cornwallis would cross at Cowan's, make a rapid march and try to take Morgan by surprise.

The water soon went down, and this program was carried out; but it came to nothing, owing to the fact that Morgan had already marched onward, away from the river.

General Greene joined him that same day and took command.

This was a great relief to General Morgan.

He was in poor condition to command the force.

The British under Cornwallis found a force of several hundred North Carolina farmers guarding Cowan's Ford, and a brief engagement took place.

The farmers fired two or three volleys, but as this did not stop the redcoats, who waded across the river and attacked the patriots, they fled, after their commander, Colonel Davidson, was killed.

Three hundred of the farmers fled toward Salisbury and took refuge in a tavern.

Tarleton, with a detachment, was sent to rout this little force, but twelve of his men were killed and fifteen were wounded.

The patriot force hastened onward toward Salisbury.

That point was reached at last.

The British were not far behind.

The soldiers did not tarry long.

They were soon on the way again.

It was fifteen miles to the Yadkin, and they must reach and cross it ahead of the British.

The march was kept steadily up.

At last the Yadkin was reached.

Dick met the army a mile from the river, and cheered all up by telling them that he had plenty of boats ready in which they could cross the stream.

The work was accomplished with rapidity, and by nightfall the army, with the six hundred prisoners, and with all the captured baggage and arms were on the other shore.

Generals Greene and Morgan took up their quarters in a log cabin, sheltered behind a ledge of rocks.

The army went into camp.

They slept soundly that night.

Next morning Cornwallis reached the river.

His army had been marching all night, in the hope that it might catch the patriots before they reached the river.

But they had been unable to do so.

Now Cornwallis could only look at the patriots, over on the other side of the river, and wish that he might get at them.

In desperation, he ordered his cannon to be unlimbered and the patriot encampment bombarded.

This was done, but no harm to the patriots resulted.

A cannon ball did strike the roof of the cabin in which General Morgan lay sick, and in which General Greene sat, writing, and tear off a lot of shingles and drop splinters down on the table in front of General Greene; but he only glanced up, and then went on writing.

Such was the material of which the patriots—both officers and soldiers—were made.

Do you wonder that they succeeded in achieving their Independence?

THE END.

The next number (27) of "The Liberty Boys of '76," will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS' GOOD SPY WORK; OR, WITH THE REDCOATS IN PHILADELPHIA," by Harry Moore.

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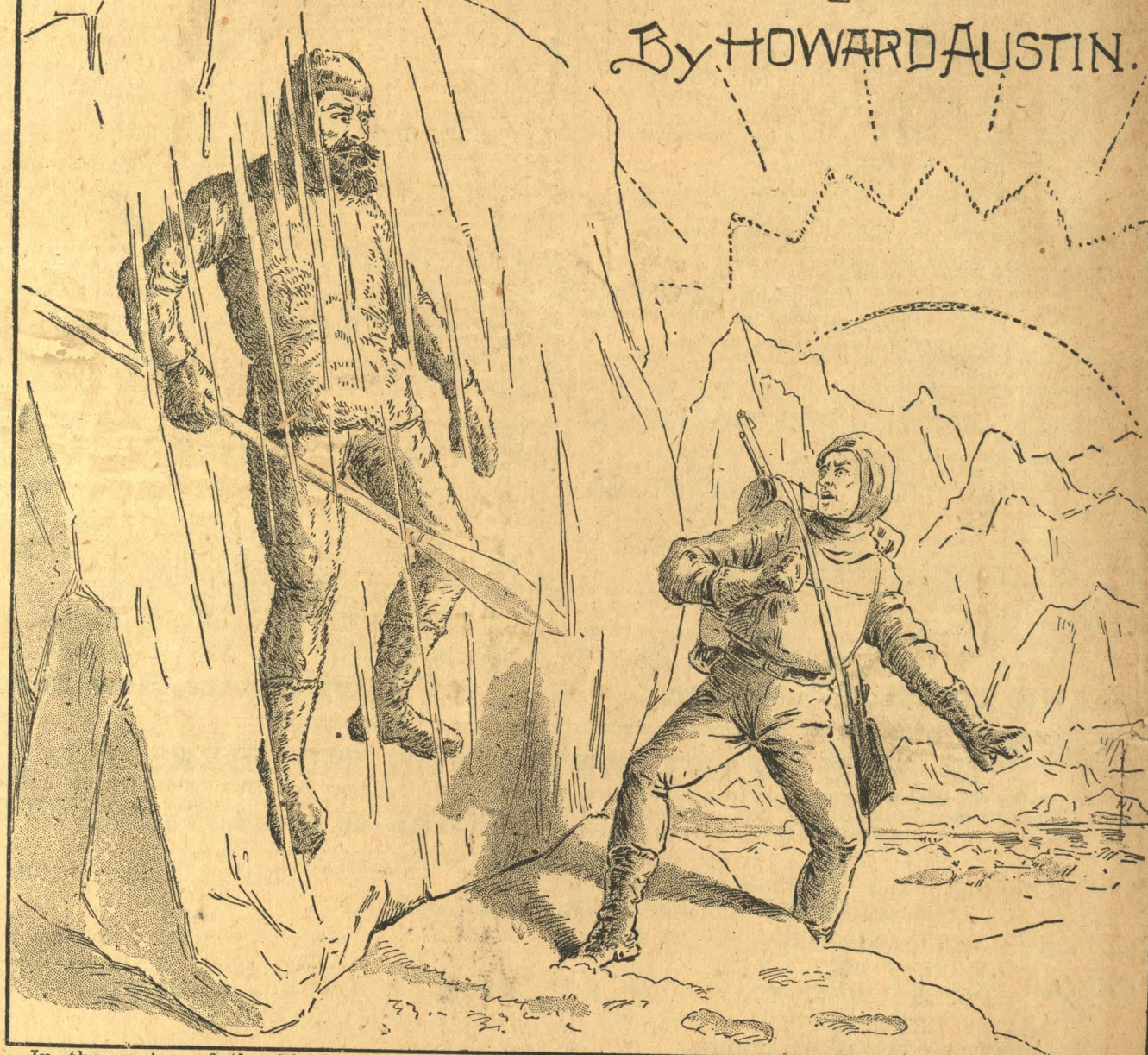
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